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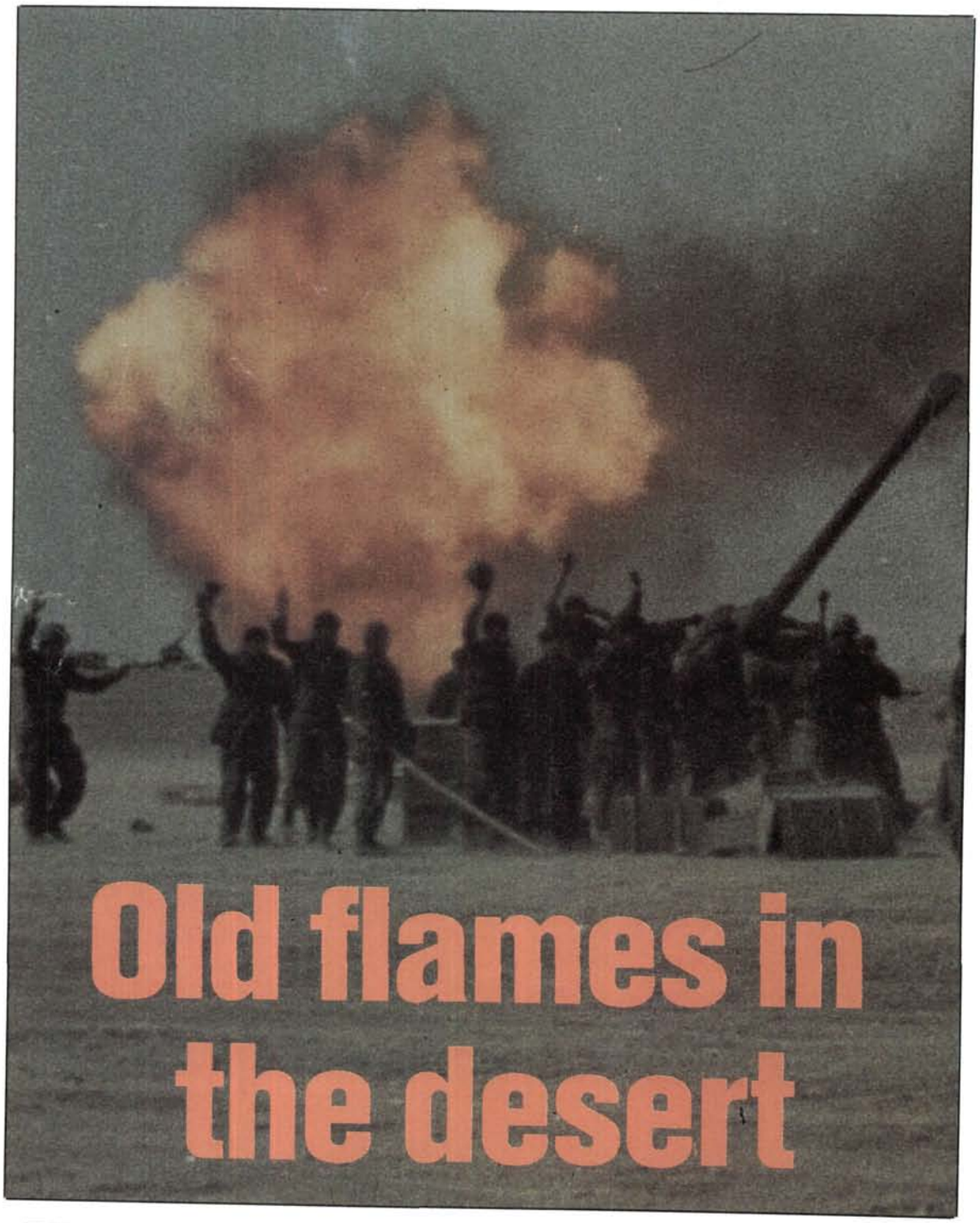

Old flames in the desert

Western pressures blew the lid off the Gulf. How can we avoid the fire next time?

Dilip Hiro on the west's corrupt allies in the Gulf

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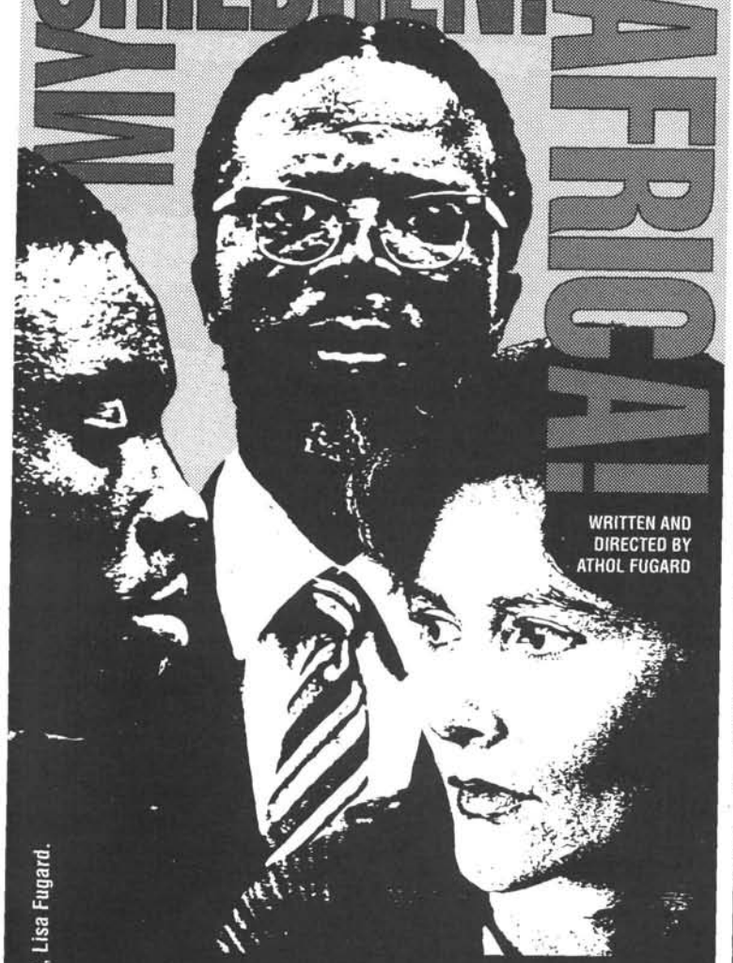

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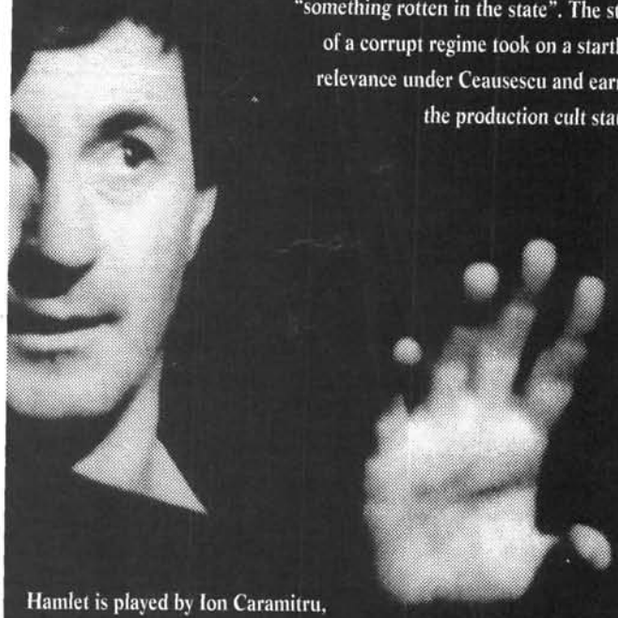

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CONTENTS

NEW STATESMAN & SOCIETY

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Features

Being prepared 12
Vicky Hutchings sells her knowledge of things green to a multinational

Kent's new cockneys 18
Punjabis and Czechs are the new labourers in the Garden of England, reports Sarah Baxter

Regulars

Editorial 4
How far should Bush be allowed to go in his war with Saddam?

Word-bites 5
Collapse of East Germany; end of the 45 single; Mandelson's new career; crime and punishment

Political Column 6
Sarah Benton asks who speaks for those against war

Taking liberties 7
Lord Denning has *always* been loopy, says Jolyon Jenkins

Diary 8
Sean French; Roger Woddis

Letters 22

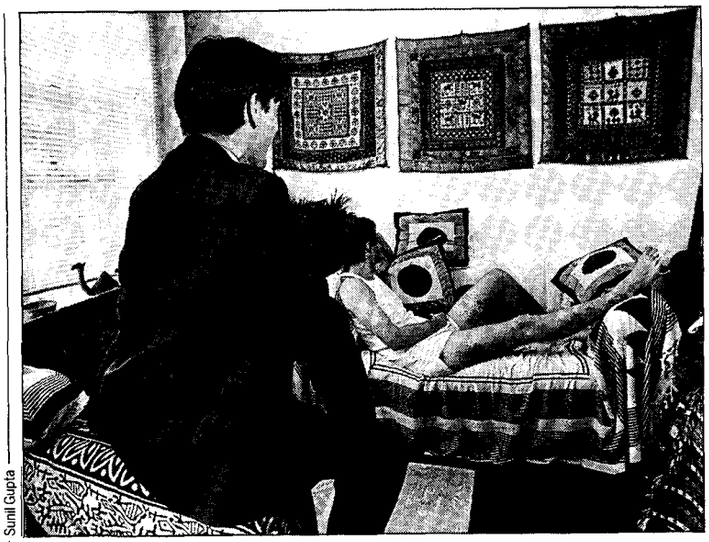
Fringe benefits 23
Colin Ward on historical attitudes to sea and sunbathing

Public interest 40
Ruth Lister in defence of universal child benefit

Endgames 46
Competition; Chess; Graffiti

Contributors 46

Cover: Rex Features



Sunil Gupta

10 Boys' Own Stories

Rent boys are always seen as victims—of abuse. Tim Robinson talks to men who chose careers in prostitution and gain from exploiting themselves

THE ARAB WORLD

Frank Spooner Pictures

14 A few of our favourite kings

Smashing Saddam will not make the west's rich clients in the Gulf look any more lovable, says Dilip Hiro

16 Backs to the wall

The PLO's support for Iraq threatens to destroy international sympathy for the Palestinian cause. Stephen Howe talks to its top officials

25 In the dark

Neil Bartlett explains how ravishing locations and multiple layers of sexual subterfuge compelled him to bring *Sarrasine* to Edinburgh

30 Short story: Sex and Drugs and Rock 'n' roll Part II

When a 13 year old needs to know about blow jobs and dope, her mother must respond: a short story by Jenny Diski

Gloria: one of the fluid characters in *Sarrasine* by Neil Bartlett p25

Artefax 24

Turtlemania: Ros Coward on the ubiquitous reptiles
Performance: Neil Bartlett's *Sarrasine*
Architecture: Eastern European modernism
Music: Sax talk

A family outing to the Bay of Nigg, p36

Books 33

Economics: Will Hutton on Sir Alan Walters
Memoirs: Andrei Sakharov; Elias Canetti
History: Scottish voices; British intelligence in the second world war; British society since 1945
Plus: New novels by Penelope Fitzgerald, Ann Oakley and Jaci Stephen; a dictionary of Borges; Chico Mendes and the Amazon rainforest

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The lone ranger

The world has backed Bush's immediate response to Iraqi aggression. But how far should the US president go?

A new world order is being shaped in the Gulf. It is a moment of great opportunities as well as of potential disasters. The nations of the world almost unanimously agree that Saddam Hussein's forcible seizure of Kuwait must be reversed and that the Iraqi dictator must be restrained from further aggression. This is a rare degree of unanimity and it makes possible a new conduct of international relations in the post-cold-war world.

We are not unaware of the hypocrisies of the US position nor blind to the self-interest involved. Kuwait has the good fortune to be an oil-rich client state of the west. The world's determination to stop Iraq's aggression ought at least to have been inspired by the gassing of innocent men, women and children of Iraq's Kurdish people in 1988 (as we argued at the time, "Silence deep as death", *NSS* 16 September 1988), and rather sooner, and not when the price of oil rises to US$24 a barrel. Mrs Thatcher's own repugnance at Saddam's monstrous regime would have greater resonance if it had not, up to now, been submerged by her desire to share in a lucrative foreign market. President Bush's parallels with Hitler might have more force if the US had not earlier intervened on Iraq's side in the Gulf war against Iran; and if he accepted that Saddam Hussein, just as Hitler did, gains strength from an unjust regional settlement.

But at this moment we ought to be grateful for the speed and scale of the US military and diplomatic response. The US is an imperfect agent of world order—more a frontier sheriff than a world policeman—but it is the only nation in the world with the power and resources to do what it has done: namely, to deter Saddam Hussein and to push him into some kind of negotiating position.

The principle on which the world has united in clear: nations and people must not be occupied by force. That has to be the governing principle for the future conduct of the Gulf crisis. And that principle has to be uniformly applied. This means that the US, and European powers, must insist that Israel hand back territories it too has acquired by force (though in different circumstances) as part of an overall settlement. This means a Palestinian state on the West Bank. Saddam Hussein's bargaining proposals may be demagoguery, but they are not just demagoguery.

Anything less will poison the politics of the Middle East for generations to come, provide a popular and unifying cause for endless Saddam Husseins and stultify efforts to establish more democratic regimes. It will turn the confrontation in the Gulf into a Christian-Muslim conflict. It will expose the west as two-faced hypocrites who are willing to pour huge resources, and perhaps thousands of lives, into saving a puppet regime, but who are willing to deny the Palestinians the nationhood that the world recognises should be theirs. It will, in a word, show us up as imperialists.

And while Kuwaiti sovereignty must be restored, that does not necessarily imply the return of its unreformed autocratic regime. No more does it mean that democracy should be imposed on the Kuwaitis.

The smoke signals from Washington suggest, however, that one of Bush's principal aims is to maintain, and indeed strengthen, Israel's present position. There is a newfound enthusiasm in US thinking for Israel's pre-emptive strike against Iraq's nuclear plant in 1981 and a new confidence in America's role as the major superpower. It seems that Britain is being marginally more cautious than the US, but it is important that both nations now make sure that they carry the Security Council with them. In particular, they must not deny the Soviet Union a role, especially as a mediator. If war can be avoided, it should be.

Another of Bush's aims, according to reports from Washington, is to take out Saddam Hussein himself. If we are honest, we find ourselves torn between our own horror for a man who has established a state of terror in Iraq and committed endless crimes against humanity (the record is clear: read Samir al-Khalil's *Republic of Fear*, newly republished in paperback by Hutchinson Radius) and our commitment to self-determination. It would, of course, be grotesque if the world's forces ranged against Iraq were finally compelled to rescue the hostages, the Kuwaitis and other foreign nationals by force of arms, but left the Iraqis and Kurds under Saddam Hussein's evil rule.

Saddam Hussein plainly ought to be removed, tried and incarcerated for his crimes. But it is the people of Iraq who should remove him, not a hypocritical western president. The bloody removal of Saddam Hussein ought not therefore to be one of the world's aims in the Gulf, not least because many others would pay for it with their lives.

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Bitter harvest

In the days of the cold war, liberals used to accuse socialists of adhering to the doctrine that ends justify means. The left, it was said, excused repression and misery with the maxim that "You can't make an omelette without breaking eggs."

There are plenty of literal eggs (and free-range ones, too) being broken on the farms of East Germany this month. Since economic union with the Federal Republic in July, shops have switched *en masse* to imported produce (such as battery-farmed eggs), often lured by bribes from giant food firms in the West. Farming in the East has collapsed at lightning speed, with cooperatives liquidated, grants withdrawn and 800,000 rural workers and their families on the brink of destitution. The eggs of subsidy and protection have all been smashed. But no one can yet see the faintest sign of the great liberal omelette: a thriving competitive market that keeps producers on their toes and customers satisfied.

Instead, that golden oldie of Marxism, the drift to private monopoly, has staged a comeback. East Germany's doomed apology for a government craves inward investment. It will not raise too many quibbles when a Siemens or a Daimler-Benz makes an offer it can't refuse. The main resistance to Lufthansa's curent bid for the local airline Interflug has come from *West* Germany's anti-cartel office. Meanwhile, the East German coalition, which this week lost its Social Democrat members, behaves like a school debating club with the end of term in sight.

Full accession to the West's constitution may now come a month early, in September. That will not save the cereal farmers, whose rye is rotting in the fields for want of a buyer. An old-fashioned people, in flight from state socialism, has found itself chewed up and spat out by western capital. They may write off the harvest in the East this year, but the seeds of a new Fascism have already been sown.

45 and over

Is that it? Can a cultural signifier vanish into literal insignificance with so little fanfare? The seven-inch vinyl 45 rpm single is about to become defunct in favour of the cassette and compact disc single.

Before beginning the all-purpose cultural lament, which can easily be adapted to anything from the threepenny bit to the steam train, it is worth noting that the single's demise is itself a refutation of Michael Ignatieff's three-minute culture idea (which proved itself by coming and going within the statutory 180 seconds).

The single was about pop as disposability. Singles got piled up in corners without their sleeves. A month after purchase it sounded as if it had been recorded with a bowl of Rice Krispies next to the microphone. A year later the vocalist had to cope with what sounded like sustained automatic-rifle fire.

Your vinyl single comfortingly decayed as you did while the CD single embalms its brief ephemeral message for ever. But then cassettes and CDs are really about albums, and the disappearance of the 45 is further confirmation that the single as an art form is almost beyond resuscitation.

There is something to regret here. The great moments of R'n'B, rock'n'roll, soul, country and western have been sparked off by the provincial small label willing to record something strange and issue some hastily pressed 78s or 45s. Hardly anyone can create a great album but literally thousands of groups and performers have recorded a couple of minutes of music that captured a mood or a time or a place.

There won't be much more of that. There will be CD singles of course but the form is, in any real sense, as dead as the Gregorian chant. Pop will now be like classic jazz, a largely finite, antiquarian field, to be recycled and reanthologised on CD for ever.

Fitting the crime

Imagine this: a man is convicted of forcibly buggering another man, serves a five-year prison sentence, and is released. Some years later, he kisses a man against his will in public, is arrested, and charged with indecent assault. Normally, he could expect to receive a conditional discharge, or even just a bind-over. But because of the previous conviction, the court imposes the maximum possible sentence—in this case, ten years. So he spends longer in prison for the kiss than for the first crime.

Under a proposed change in the law announced this week, it seems that such an outcome will theoretically be possible. Home Office minister John Patten revealed plans to let judges impose maximum sentences for minor offences of sex and violence, if there is a history of major offences.

The change may be more cosmetic than real, designed to inspire "Crackdown on Violent Crime" headlines and appease those generically known in Tory circles as "the Guildford ladies". But the measure is objectionable. Its effect could be to make someone serve two sentences for the same offence. It contradicts the axiom that the punishment should fit the crime. And it is a throwback to the days when judges could impose additional "preventive" sentences on people they deemed to be "habitual criminals".

Penal reformers often point out that only a small minority of the prison population has been convicted of violent crime, and that the vast majority could safely be released. The government has begun to accept and act on that argument. But there is no reason why the price of a progressive policy for the majority of offenders should be injustice for the minority.

Red rose man

One would have thought that Peter Mandelson's moustache would rule him out as a style-setter, but the man who put a red rose in the buttonhole of every Labour MP has just joined London's most fashion-conscious design consultant, SRU. He will soon be working alongside Peter York, the inventor of the Sloane Ranger, and Dennis Stevenson, the chairman of the revamped Tate Gallery, who likes to *épater les bourgeois* by turning up to respectable meetings without wearing socks.

For £28,000 a year, Mandelson will advise SRU's clients on how to be more environmentally-friendly, a far from easy task with companies like the tobacco giants BAT ("Golden Virginia—it's enough to make your red rose wilt"). But SRU must think it has found a marketing genius on the cheap. It seems a trifling sum to pay for the person who gave us the home movie, "Jonathan Livingstone Kinnock", and ditched Labour's cloth-capped "beer and sandwiches" image in favour of a "prawn cocktail offensive" in the Square Mile.

How this will all go down in Mandelson's chosen constituency of Hartlepool is another matter. Few Sloane Rangers have ventured there and beer and sandwiches are still popular in the local pub. Unaccountably enough, the gritty, Labour voters of north-east England also like to wear socks. How very exotic their new candidate must seem.

Among the stage army of Gulf pundits monopolising the airwaves this past fortnight has been a ghost from the *New Statesman*'s past. Sir James Craig, former British ambassador to Saudi Arabia, is happy to share his wisdom about Arab affairs with *Newsnight* viewers. He was less pleased when in 1986 the *NS* tried to publish his valedictory despatch from Saudi Arabia—in which he gave his opinion of the Arab character and Saudi society in less-than-diplomatic terms. The Foreign Office rushed to the High Court and obtained an injunction preventing publication. Good commercial relations with the Arab world were thus maintained; thousands of Britons remained in the Gulf; and the rest is history—or soon will be.

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POLITICAL COLUMN

Bashing the drum

The anti-war camp has begun to stir within Britain, but will it find a political voice?

Sarah Benton

There's nothing like the threat of war for making people want to join up. If the drum-beat of patriotic violence summons some to join the fighters, it makes others rush to join the army for peace. Either way, the imminence of war and its promise of massive destruction prepares people for sacrifice: of their money (donations to CND soared when, in 1983, the threat of nuclear war seemed real), of their lives, of their individualism. Only under this threat of war are people in modern liberal states ready to give up their right to make individual judgments on how public affairs should be conducted. Hence the power of leaders at such moments of crisis as this.

Last week, CND, Plaid Cymru and the Green Party issued the faint rallying call to join the anti-war camp. Had they wanted to, they could have acted as recruiting sergeant for those horrified by Britain's military rush to the Gulf; a growing band of radicals, pacifists, Muslims, anti-imperialists; of all those who are not represented by our two-party system. For it appears to be that system which gave Gerald Kaufman his embarrassing role as the drum-boy for the world party.

Feeling at odds with statements by Labour frontbenchers is a normal state of affairs for the left. But normally this grumbling discontent merely confirms the political passivity of the critics. It presses them only into writing one more letter (actual or imaginary) to the *Guardian*, making one more speech (almost always imaginary) to an invisible crowd, fantasising a particularly scintillating contribution to *Any Questions*: in the modern democratic state, any citizen can be a politician for 15 minutes. And in that state, the normal relation of individuals to public life is fantasy. Let Militant organise the band of hyper-active poll-tax protesters; we will think up an article on the history of iniquitous taxation.

This imagined relation to public life is similar to what Czechoslovakian novelist Milan Kundera, in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, called "graphomania". This obsession with writing, he wrote, takes on the scale of a mass epidemic when three conditions prevail: a high enough degree of well-being to allow the individual to devote energies to useless activities; an advanced state of social atomisation and the isolation of the individual; and a radical absence of significant social change in the life of the nation. This hypothesis shares some ground with theories of emigration (individuals who can mobilise resources— move out of a nation which is socially stagnant) and stakes out opposite ground from theories of social protest (individuals get together when they perceive significant social change in ways they don't like but which gives them opportunities to act). In other words, talented people in poor but going-nowhere countries emigrate; talented individuals in rich and going-nowhere countries imagine their route to influence.

Britain has been languishing—if a nation of political and literary dreamers can be said to be languishing—in the latter state. Its thinkers and erstwhile activists are profoundly divorced from those in whose name they would like society to change. They visited Greenham Common in the manner of politicians paying respectful visits to their troops abroad; perhaps voted Green, secretly, in the Euro elections and have failed to pay their poll tax only because they are paralysed by indecision.

Feeling at odds with statements by Labour frontbenchers is a normal state of affairs for the left

It is not so much a state of graphomania, but one of an imagined relation to politics. This may seem no more than the old condition of armchair socialism (though even Virginia Woolf attended meetings of the Co-op Women's Guild). But the condition goes far beyond those who have grown too old or too grand to go to meetings. There is a double rupture: between the thinkers and the dispossessed; and between the system of political representatives and political community. For a political community is not just created by economic factors (mass production lines = socialist working class) but a political community is also summoned into being by those who can interpret and fashion a collective political identity. This is exactly what Islamic leaders are discovering among the dispossessed members of our cities.

Without such communities and without any handle on actual power, most British members of parliament deal only with the problems of individuals. Ask Labour MPs to describe an ordinary day, and they will groan over the caseload of individual problems they have to deal with. This tells us something about how individuals with problems perceive power (so centralised, hierarchical, and impenetrable, that only the professionals at the top can deal with it). It also tells us how illusory is the political power of MPs. Only those with the money to pay for lobbyists, and preferably to pay the MP directly as consultant, can function as political communities which brief, and guide, the MP.

Thus it was that the little scandal buried by the Gulf—the revelation of Michael Mates's consultancy with a defence contractor—had an ephemeral link with that same Gulf crisis. Both manifest the unspoken realities of day-to-day power; both manifest the voicelessness of those who are not organised into a political or business community. Few MPs, especially Conservatives, represent geographical communities, not least because it's a rare constituency that constitutes a distinct political community. It has no organised and coherent voice to compel an MP's attention.

Those who operate in the unseen world of political realities do, of course, have a coherent voice. They include the weapons suppliers, the organised lobbies seeking to write their names into the small print of legislation and government contracts. They also include the military itself—the most potent and unaccountable lobby in Whitehall. And the handful of politicians who have the power to send off British armed forces without the need for any public endorsement. (America's War Powers Act forces the President to report any commitment of armed forces to Congress within 48 hours, though it's a poor President who hasn't been able to find his way round this.)

This shift in politics towards a combination of individual casework and professional lobbies has not only changed the MP's role; it itself feeds back into the electorate. Or rather, the *absence* of collective, grassroots links feeds back. Parliamentary parties these days do virtually nothing to shape grassroots political communities. And the political communities which flare up lose heart and lose vision for lack of powerful support and die down like fireflies.

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TAKING LIBERTIES

Jolyon Jenkins

I only met Lord Denning once, when he was still Master of the Rolls. The fashion seems to be to breach conversational confidences, so I reproduce our dialogue in full below:
Denning: Well done, Jenkins.
Self: Thank you, sir.
This memorable exchange occurred at my school's 1979 speech day, during the presentation of the sixth-form prize for physics. My only other recollection of the event is that Denning had the floppiest handshake imaginable.

Curious to see what Denning had said in his speech, I looked up the school magazine's report of the day. There was nothing about hanging—but otherwise his remarks were strikingly similar to what he told A N Wilson in last week's *Spectator*. He claimed that English law was based on the freedom of the individual—"ideals that have been carried throughout the world by English settlers". This benevolent rule, he said, was "being undermined by extremist groups", and "mobs walking the streets". In the face of this, he said, the police behaved magnificently and every right-minded person had a duty to support them. He also urged us to love England, to parade our patriotism proudly, and to "think without confusion".

Denning's obituaries will stress his willingness to set aside established law in favour of what he thought was right. As he told A N Wilson, he developed early on an "inbuilt feeling of what justice should be". His heraldic motto is *Fiat justitia*—"let justice be done." In last week's *Sunday Correspondent*, its columnist David Blake constructed a curious argument out of this. By ignoring the existing law, Blake said, Denning became a "popular progressive judge". But, he continued, the only legitimate way to bring about change is to "convince the people". Charter 88's call for a bill of rights "invites the electorate to renounce some of its sovereignty in order to have good done for it". As Blake sees it, a bill of rights would be something thrust on an unwilling populace by a liberal élite, aided by progressive judges like Denning.

This line of thought at least has the virtue of novelty, but it is surely utterly perverse. Under a bill of rights it would be the executive which lost power, not the electorate. Moreover, a latter-day Denning would be *constrained* by a bill. Instead of overturning laws he didn't like, according to his own occult view of justice, he would have to apply general principles laid down in writing. A bill of rights is not an invitation to judges to become capricious, but to be consistent.

The point, moreover, about Denning is not that he is progressive, but that it is hard to determine exactly *what* his views are. On the one hand, there is the *Fiat justitia* stuff about the freedom of the individual. On the other, there is his celebrated view that it is better for individuals to be punished for things they didn't do than for confidence in the legal system to be undermined (an idea in stark opposition to the whole notion of a bill of rights).

The flat contradiction in those two positions has nothing to do with Denning's senility or A N Wilson's underhand interviewing technique: "thinking without confusion" has never been Denning's strongest suit. The scandal is not that he says outrageous things in retirement, but that he got away with saying exactly the same things when he was still laying down the law.

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DIARY

Sean French

The dictionaries that I use ignore the fact that in ordinary discourse certain words and phrases are *used in the opposite sense to their* real meaning. The word "literally", for example, is now so casually used as an intensive (of the "I'm literally dead with exhaustion" type) that in 99 per cent of conversational use it now means "metaphorically".

Similarly, the phrase "with respect" in ordinary usage actually means, "I am about to be very rude to you indeed."

Just a couple of weeks ago I delivered an opinion—it was probably my theory that screen violence is actually good for you—and my interlocutor simply replied: "With respect, that's just wank," which did not at the time seem an entirely authentic example of the formal respect that is apparently so highly prized within mafia circles.

There used also to be the political example—that any country with the word "democratic" in its title was necessarily a totalitarian state, but this is no longer true.

In journalism—and this is what set my train of thought chuffing off—beware of any commentator who is described as "independent". The editor of the *Sunday Times*, Andrew Neil, once described his columnist Norman Macrae as a maverick who was unclassifiable on the political spectrum.

If I may interpret, that is code for "a slavish admirer of every aspect of the Thatcherite programme who is critical only when this programme is not being carried out in sufficiently extreme fashion."

Like the paper he writes for, Macrae is preoccupied with the threat posed by the unpatriotic, immoral, left wing and apparently all-powerful chattering classes dedicated to undermining the country. In last week's column he blamed them for opposing the Gulf War. As I read, I wondered why he wasn't citing any examples, but then it turned out that there weren't any yet.

In his words, "these views are going to be gesticulated into you every night by television interviewers with waving hands." I found this picture of left views being gesturally inserted fascinating, if baffling.

Does Macrae mean that left-wing interviewers communicate their wicked views subliminally, by semaphore perhaps? Or does he have in mind the sign language used in TV programmes for the deaf? On the *Today* programme on Radio Four, Brian Redhead presumably has to resort to other means.

He then offered his own "shockingly independent thoughts". Beware once more. That is code for "familiar orthodoxy". As he put it: "We Britons should stay so proud of our desperate Falklands glory." This is such an odd sentence that I assume it must be a submerged quotation. Is it from a hymn?

The haunting phrase "a wilderness of mirrors" was coined, I believe, to describe that state of madness that *spy-hunters can develop as they try* to distinguish between single, double and triple agents, but it neatly describes a certain kind of polemic which is peculiarly difficult to argue with. You invent views, often based on versions of events that are themselves fictional, ascribe them to people, and then attack them for it.

Take the following two crucial sentences from Norman Macrae's article: "Ronald Reagan was crucified in his last year because he moved deviously for better relations with Iran, and even more deviously subsidised the contras' resistance in Nicaragua. All the people who now say we should not strike at Saddam told Reagan that all Nicaraguans loved their communist government and that Iran would respond to overtures with increased fanaticism."

One has to peel away the layers of error from this farrago like an onion, unless "crucified" is being used in the hitherto unknown sense of "not prosecuted". American reluctance to initiate a conflict is currently being articulated by those to Bush's right. Jeane Kirkpatrick, who, incidentally as UN ambassador to the United Nations, also opposed American support for Britain during Macrae's beloved Falklands campaign, has argued pragmatically that in the Gulf "the US commitment goes further than US interests." Macrae's obsessive hostility to any form of statist politics might make it difficult for him to understand that America was taken into two world wars by liberal presidents.

I don't care about Macrae's ideas but they ought to be supported by reference to events that have taken place and opinions that have actually been expressed. But, of course, that might make his Friedman-by-numbers of world politics harder to sustain.

When I first went around London looking for somewhere to live I loathed the experience. The only bit I found at all enjoyable was the chance of being able to be nosy in strangers' houses. I was far more interested in the contents of people's wardrobes than I was in checking through all the details that are meant to be so important when you are trying to buy.

Now I'm on the receiving end and, since I bought in a boom and am attempting to sell in a slump, it's a longer process this time. There's something oddly insulting about it as well, rather as if I had put my own body up for sale and then had total strangers come and examine it while consulting my medical records. "What about this visit to a Special Clinic? Did anything come of it? And were you cured by all that psychoanalysis?" (I am of course quoting fictional examples because of the lack of anything remotely embarrassing in my actual medical records.)

Then they look at you a bit more closely with a furrowed brow. "Are those spots just acne, or do you have a disease? Have you ever tried to treat them? I suppose it would be expensive to have them surgically removed. I'm sorry, at first I thought you had a high forehead, but you're actually going bald, aren't you? I'm afraid that doesn't suit us. We'd want to dye your hair a different colour and I think it would start falling out even faster. Anyway, thank you very much for letting us have a look at you. Goodbye."

At least I now know that if there were someone I really wanted to revenge myself on, there would be no need to consider violence or elaborate conspiracies. I would just wait until my enemy's dwelling came on the market and then arrange for lots of people to walk around it with a sneering expression on their faces and no comment except "Fascinating. It must have been a real challenge."

ROGER WODDIS

Sing-along

"If it should be concluded that sanctions are too uncertain and diplomacy unavailing, the US will need to consider a surgical and progressive destruction of Iraq's military assets."
—Dr Henry Kissinger

There's a hole in your anus,
Dear Henry, dear Henry,
There's a hole in your anus,
Dear Henry, a hole.

Please stop talking through it,
Dear Henry, dear Henry,
Please stop talking through it,
Dear Henry, please stop.

Iraq's not Grenada,
Dear Henry, dear Henry,
Iraq's not Grenada,
Dear Henry, it's not.

Don't dream of Cambodia,
Dear Henry, dear Henry,
Don't dream of Cambodia,
Dear Henry, don't dream.

There's a hole in your anus,
Dear Henry, dear Henry,
There's a hole in your anus,
Dear Henry, a hole.

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"Could you cope with waking up to find that cockroaches have drowned in your mouth?"

DANNY DE SOUZA WHO SPENT 12 YEARS IN A TURKISH PRISON

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In 56 countries Prisoners Abroad works for the welfare and interests of Britons detained overseas and their families here in Britain. Some suffer terrible deprivation, degrading conditions and torture. Some depend on us for their *total* survival. We are the only charity working in this field. We urgently need to raise more funds both to continue our work and to reach out to over 1000 others who also need our help. Please help us to help them by completing and returning the coupon below. Your support will make someone's detention more bearable. It may mean the difference between despair and hope. It could even save a life.

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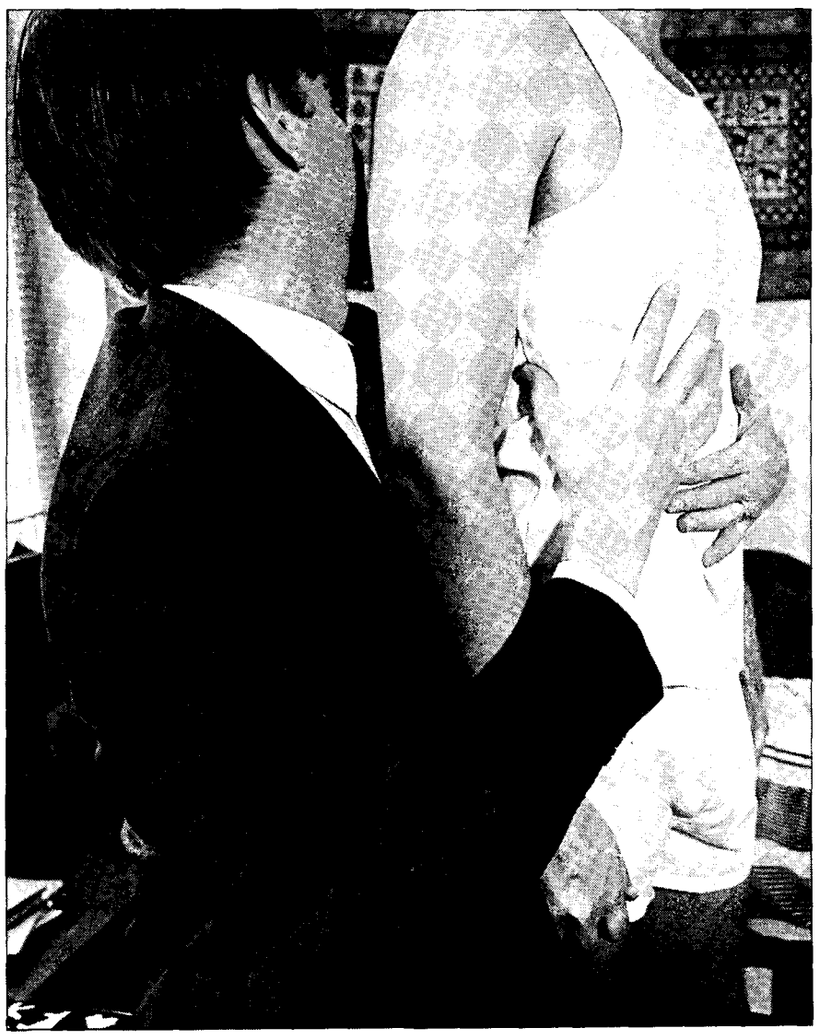
Boys' Own Stories

The "rent boy" is always seen as a victim. But many men choose male prostitution and enjoy a comfortable career. Tim Robinson unpicks the myth of the meat rack

"What makes a boy a whore?" The rent boy is seen typically as a victim, a disturbed runaway from a violent and unloving home, and usually the subject of some previous sexual abuse. Destitute, looking for love and closeness with a substitute father figure, he is easy prey for the exploitative older homosexual. The now mythical seventies documentary *Johnny Come Home*, shockingly pertinent as it was then, reinforced this all-encompassing image of the homosexual male prostitute.

But suppose that male prostitution is not the result of a twisted child psyche? What if it is an occupation, maybe not quite like any other, but chosen by men from a wide set of social backgrounds, with diverse skills and expectations? No one tries to uncover the uniform childhood conditions that drive someone to be a lawyer or a plumber. Why should prostitution necessarily be different?



Sunil Gupta

After one and a half years of researching homosexual male prostitutes, I have been confronted, not by carbon-copy psychological disasters, but by diversity. There's 31-year-old Gerry paying his large mortgage by specialising in sado-masochistic services. He's made his way up the career structure, graduating from Glasgow rent boy through London's more lucrative rent-scene and escort agencies to self-governing sexual masseur. There's 22-year-old Christopher who mixes massage parlour work with Soho pick-ups in order to finance his artistic aspirations. And, of course, there's 18-year-old Allen, thrown out by his dad in Scotland, now homeless, drinking too much and going home with any old punter just for a bed for the night. But Allen is not in the majority, so why has his "type" been allowed to hog the limelight for so long?

For the last 30 years, the study of male homosexual prostitutes has been bedevilled by sensationalism and academic myopia. The titles of two well-known papers on the subject, *Boys for Sale* and *The Meat Rack*, are without doubt spicier and more enticing than the average sociology article, but employ imagery that is almost Victorian in its moral outrage. In 1974, a psychopathologist wrote characteristically that the male prostitute: "is a drifter, has a poor work history, possesses no vocational skill, is of low to average intelligence, comes from a deprived socioeconomic background, and is below the average of educational attainment. His was a shattered family in which there was a dearth of warmth and an excess of violence and rejection. He was the victim of indifferent mothering."

More recently the spectre of child abuse has been added to this litany of disasters. Ex-rent boys Richie McMullen and Nigel O'Mara (who founded Survivors—an organisation for victims of male rape) have argued that sexual abuse is the single, central explicatory factor behind homosexual male prostitution. It's an argument that only adds weight to the orthodoxy by assuming that prostitution is such an essentially degrading and corrupt activity that no one could choose it for a career. Male prostitutes must be ultimately powerless, out of control, victims.

Under a quarter of those to whom I've spoken reported child sexual abuse. More interestingly, those who did speak of having sex with older men when they themselves were in early puberty frequently spoke of the occasions in a positive way, particularly if the man had paid them money. Christopher, the sexual masseur/rent boy, is a particularly inter-

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esting example. From the ages of 12 to 16 he had a relationship with a man in his sixties, which he insists was extremely abusive. "I completely abused him," says Christopher. "He felt so fucked up about his sexuality and about having sex with someone of my age that he kept telling me that he didn't want to see me, or when he saw me, he wouldn't do anything. I just used to wriggle about in front of him, until he couldn't resist me anymore... You see I got a bicycle out of it, and loads of sweets, and money, and I was the only kid in my street with a portable telly."

Christopher believes that our idea of childhood sexual innocence implicitly disempowers children, assuming that the younger partner inevitably becomes the object of abuse, and the elder lover the powerful one. He firmly rejects the notion that his early experiences were the first tentative steps on the downward path to prostitution. He does see one connection, however: "It did make me aware that I could make easy money from my sexuality."

Christopher was then living in semi-genteel poverty in working-class Southport, with his well-born mother, who had lost her wealth in a particularly nasty divorce. He moved to London to train as a dancer at one of the capital's most prestigious dance schools, and soon discovered the existence of Soho's most famous rent boy pub. This striking 18 year old, with his shock of (naturally) orange hair, quickly found a lucrative outlet by providing punters with an adept, but swift, hand-job in exchange for £20 or £30. However, it was only after suffering a back injury which put an end to the prospect of a serious career in dance that he committed himself wholeheartedly to selling his body.

Preferring a more organised set-up than he had been used to, he answered an advertisement in one of the gay publications requesting masseurs. After arranging an interview, he turned up at the west London parlour—a kitsch affair decorated with a plethora of Buddha statues. After displaying his physical attributes to the proprietor, he joined the other masseurs behind a one-way glass screen so the punters were able to pick out their favourite. The sessions tended to consist of a perfunctory massage, followed by something more overtly sexual. This usually involved a cocktail of masturbation, oral sex, occasional fucking and, more frequently, some corporal punishment.

Christopher typifies the masseur's professionalism by stressing that any sexual violence that occurs is always administered and not received by him. When fucking, which he rarely does with punters, he will always adopt the role of inserter and never without a condom, to minimise the risk of HIV infection. He's aware of his power. "A lot of the men who come there—I mean quite a lot are married, for instance—are really screwed up because of the social construction of masculinity, homosexuality and prostitution, and that's why they get a kick out of being beaten up. But when they want to do it to me, which is much less common, I put a stop to it. A good whore always, always stays in control."

Gerry, the 31-year-old Glaswegian masseur, echoes these sentiments: "I'm always in control and I've got a load of equipment to make sure that's the case." His investment in sado-masochistic accoutrements, from leather harnesses to canes and rubber crops, has helped to expand a flagging business for, as Gerry freely admits: "This is the one career where you become worth less as you grow older."

Gerry's sex-for-money exchanges began somewhat later than Christopher's, having only "played around" with boys of his own age before 17. At that age, he began to meet clients, irregularly, in Glasgow toilets. Coming down to London at 19, he soon joined the ranks of the "Dilly" boys, having impulsively squandered all the money he'd saved to cushion his arrival on an impulse Spanish holiday. He worked the streets and bars for six months, kipping at friends' and punters' houses, saving a deposit for his flat. "I couldn't stand having to work with those grunting, gobbing morons," he says, expressing his somewhat hyperbolic disapproval of

Sunil Gupta

For the last 30 years, the study of male homosexual prostitutes has been bedevilled by sensationalism and academic myopia

his one-time fellow rent boys. He explains: "They didn't even seem to be interested in making money. A lot of them just seem to see it as an excuse for hanging around with each other and chatting." Their lamentable absence of the entrepreneurial spirit drove Gerry from the streets.

Once he'd found a flat, and a telephone line had been installed, he contacted an escort agency and started his career as a call-boy. Late-night telephone calls from Gerry's agency would often interrupt his evenings, requesting, for instance, that he contact some elderly gentleman in Knightsbridge as soon as possible, with a view to servicing the octogenarian in a hour's time. Gerry would hop in a taxi —price added to the fee, of course—and soon arrive at the punter's house. He knew that he would have to stay an hour to an hour and a half and, like all competent prostitutes, would try and stretch out the chatting part of the session as long as possible, with the object of reducing the sexual content.

This, however, is often not against the wishes of the punter, as Gerry points out: "You are often more like a social worker than anything else. A lot of my punters want to talk to me about aspects of their lives that they can't discuss with anyone else, particularly if they're married and hiding their sexuality from their friends and family." These sentiments are echoed by Christopher, who explains that: "A lot of the

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punters never have any other contact with another gay man, and this is a chance for them to mix with an 'out' gay man, so sex is only one aspect of that contact."

After a couple of years working for the agency, Gerry decided to advertise independently in a gay magazine as a masseur so as to bypass the agency's 30 per cent claim, although he still remains on their books to supplement his income. His advert—"Firm, muscular massage"—is a masterpiece of ambiguity as few would define 12 stone of flab as either firm or muscular. Nevertheless, he has a very high client-return rate, proving that a pretty face and body, even in this profession, can be overshadowed by warmth and charm. He also works two days a week in a travel agency.

As he got older and less physically desirable, he replaced the nubile with the technically versatile, increasingly specialising in sado-masochistic sex. This also coincided with the emergence of Aids. Gerry comments on the impact of HIV on the lives of male prostitutes: "In some ways, you know, Aids hasn't been such a bad thing for us—there's a lot more demand for the kinky things, which are much more pleasant to do than fucking." A good, clean, healthy thrashing is obviously much safer, from the point of view of HIV infection, than anal intercourse, rubber-insulated or otherwise.

And what sort of future can be foreseen for these two entrepreneurs of the body? Gerry has nearly paid off his mortgage, and admits that the time has come for a change. He plans on buying a gay hotel, in the English countryside or in Spain. He's already a Tory voter and will, no doubt, slip quite comfortably into Guppie (Gay, upwardly mobile) respectability—almost as respectable as some of his Tory clients who publicly denounce the source of their secret gratification.

There's a lot more demand for the kinky things, which are much more pleasant to do than fucking

For the younger Christopher—who speaks his far more radical and less individualistic views about prostitution—things are less certain. But, given his intellect and energy, it is difficult not to imagine him succeeding in another vocation when he so chooses.

And, of course, there is Allen, the homeless victim: what will become of him? No good, one can confidently predict, and, to make an exceptionally obvious point, housing, social services and training for work are desperately needed for youths like Allen. It is the Allens, low on confidence, bargaining power and any sense of the future, who are most likely to succumb to an ignorant punter's demand for unprotected sex when the desire for a bed for the night becomes overwhelming. And who, when their youth is tarnished, will end up in the big city populations of homeless and out-of-work drunks.

Allen's desperate situation mustn't be allowed to obscure the successes of the others. Someone like Gerry will never come out as a prostitute, and it would be impossible to spot the profession of this genial, working-class-made-good thirty-something man. It is comforting for the normal person to think that the criminal or deviant wears his sin on his brow and is immediately recognisable. But the stereotype stops society from recognising the real underlying problem of the homeless and rootless young and taking measures to secure their future.

Tim Robinson is a researcher for Sextalk, *a 15-part series about sex on Channel 4.* Male for Sale *will be broadcast as part of the series on Wednesday 12 September at 10.45pm.*

IMAGE

Being prepared

Vicky Hutchings accepts £50 from an unnamed multinational to advise it how to be green

Monday morning—11.30am. A fleet of limousines, the ones whose windows glide up and down at the touch of a button, starts to convey the journalists it has been sent to collect to the Hospitality Inn in the West End. Towards midday, four ill-assorted writers have arrived and been directed, through the American tourists massing at the reception desk, to the stairs. The hotel is decorated along the sleek lines of a transatlantic liner and the room in which they find themselves is bland enough to offend no one. Paper and pencils are laid at intervals along the pale, gleaming table. At least two names that have been promised aren't there.

At the head is Paul Smith, who once worked for Unilever but is now a partner in his own research firm, Conway Smith & Rose (CSR). Paul, a laconic Scot with a ginger cast, explains that his company had been hired by "a multinational" to solve a problem: "In respect of the environment, what practical initiatives can a world-wide business like 'X' take to become a corporate role model of the 1990s?"

For this task, a "series of brainstorming sessions" with different groups has been set up. CSR has already met "senior people" from the company and its ad agency. It has spoken to greens. Lastly, it is getting together with the media: journalists on environmental magazines and now with "people such as yourselves, more mainstream". We aren't told the client's name as it might prejudice us.

First we introduce ourselves. Charlotte, in her mid-twenties, tall with long fair hair, works on a Sunday newspaper: "I write animal stories a lot. I like animal stories but I'd prefer to write about pollution." Derek, smaller and dapper, is from an evening paper and covers the environment "until they move me on to something else". Barb, like me in her mid- to late thirties, is a committed member of the Green Party and looks a tough campaigner. Barb is either a deliberate act of sabotage by CSR to skew the results, or a slip-up, since she writes for the newsletter of an environmental pressure group. Before starting, Paul thinks he'd better just check we understood the question.

"Is it image or reality that this company is interested in?" asks Barb suspiciously. "Is it actually interested in becoming as environmentally responsible as it possibly can? I would never ask it to call itself green, because a multinational by its very nature cannot be green."

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Derek thinks it's "an advantage to be seen as a role model and an environmentally friendly company these days. That's the way people are thinking. If it's both good for profits and good for image, it's gotta be good for business."

"Is this the company's own question?" I ask.

"Why do you ask that?" counters Paul.

"Because it doesn't make sense. I can't see why it wants to become a corporate role model for other businesses. If it's copied, surely it loses its commercial advantage."

"The question is also very paternalistic," says Charlotte. "And you can't have a blueprint. All companies can't do it in exactly the same way."

Over 45 minutes pass as we mull over the question. "Would somebody like to rewrite it?" asks Paul. We won't hear of it: we feel it tells us quite a bit about the company. Is he getting irritated? It's hard to say, but I begin to think he isn't quite as friendly as he was.

Paul gives us a little pep talk. He doesn't want us, he stresses, to get too bogged down in day-to-day realities or economic arguments, or to censor any of our ideas. "I'm looking for quantity rather than quality at this point." We spend the next half hour on the awesome power and general ghastliness of multinationals. I mention Bhopal...

After lunch, Paul says he is prepared to tell us, at this point, that his client is in the oil business.

We start off quite militantly by saying the company should keep out of fragile areas of great scenic beauty and leave Alaska. As the sensible tendency, I suggest that it ought to invest in a new fleet of safer tankers and stop filthy practices like cleaning out empty oil tanks at sea. Paul asks about refining and Derek causes the first rift in the ranks by suggesting all refineries be moved out of Canvey Island.

Barb, alarmed: "But where else would you put them?"

Charlotte: "Canvey Island's been ruined anyway."

Derek, mollified: "That's true."

We make some more obvious suggestions about ploughing money back into protecting the environment and, in particular, Charlotte wants to do something about the benzene fumes in garages. But Barb is less interested in piecemeal tinkering than in changing the fundamental "masculine" values that dominate big business: competition, aggression, acquisition. The company, she instructs us, should take on board feminine values like caring, sharing and cooperation. Derek rushes to agree and Barb accepts this sudden alliance with pleasure and surprise. Massage, says Derek, is the answer and would make the workforce much happier. Barb frowns. "And suggestion boxes," says Derek. "Certainly the whole workforce should be involved. *That* goes without saying," Barb's face clears.

But Derek's influence is gaining ground. The ideas become wilder: the company should encourage people to use their cars less, should put pressure on manufacturers not to advertise cars in terms of speed, and work with the Department of Transport to promote public transport. Paul remarks on how little I am saying. I confess to being out of my depth in a discussion which seems to be about advising this company how to reduce its profits by convincing the public to buy less of its products. But I have to say something. I toss in the idea of the company putting its petrol prices up to encourage people not to drive so much. As I fear, it is treated seriously.

Paul: "Let's concentrate on this initiative: Put up petrol prices, provided an explanation is given. What else could it do?" Barb says it ought to get out of the oil business and stop being a multinational.

The fun really starts. First Paul holds up a board covered in nature pictures to "trigger" initiatives. What did these images make us think of? Places we have spoilt, we say; we ought to leave them as they are, save the penguin and preserve the rainforest. Paul continues to hold up the board; something more is expected. Go in for solar, wind, and wave power, we suggest. Is this what he wants?

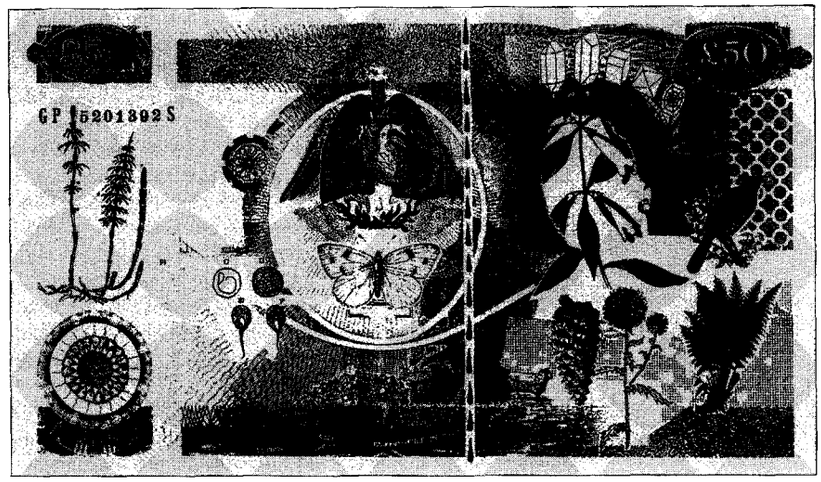
He produces another board with a number of unrelated words and phrases printed on it, tells us to choose two each and say what images they conjure up. Barb picks "Peter Gabriel" and "flowers" and says they make her think of flying over a meadow of flowers in a helicopter to the accompaniment of a Peter Gabriel guitar solo. I think I am beginning to understand the logic of this session. I decide BP (we have now been told) will have to pay me a lot more than £50 to think up its next advertising campaign.

I settle on "wind surfing" and "goal", failing to relate them in any convincing way. Charlotte opts for "books" and "caravan" and, not surprisingly, imagines someone reading a book in a caravan. Derek surpasses himself by writing a sketch, complete with dialogue, for his two: "French and Saunders" and "fish & chips". The comic duo, elevated to the board of BP, ask if their lunch has been fried in BP's very own oil.

Then, excitingly, a bag appears and we are asked to take one item from it and "free associate". I get a Casio alarm clock the size and shape of a credit card and wait. Nothing. I'm a failure. Comfortingly, the others who get a lump of coal, a walnut and a Pritt stick do little better. The ad agency will have to come up with its own ideas.

Most unnervingly of all, we are then given roles to play. I get to be Richard Branson, Derek is a fisherman, Charlotte a car manufacturer and Barb an artist. We then describe the initiatives we will take. Derek tells of his life as an environmental terrorist, forcing BP to stop polluting his fishing grounds. I talk of launching something called Oil 2000 and going up in a balloon. Charlotte offers to tune car engines in the Philippines. Barb says she'll paint a picture. Paul has the air of a man who's drawn the short straw.

Lastly, we're shown a list of all BP's green initiatives so far. We sneer happily at the acid rain kits for schoolkids, the



Jacek Depczyk

"Dorset Environmental Programme" (BP's landscaped oilfield in the middle of Dorset), the rainforest mapping, BP's oil spill response base in Southampton ("if they spill it, then they jolly well *should* clear it up!"), but are pleased by its tiny moves into combined heat and power and solar systems.

I ask Paul if BP will get anything useful out of this particular session. "Why do you ask that," he enquires, giving nothing away.

Later I ring BP's press office to find out more. A rather bemused man takes my phone number and promises to ring back. A little later, a more important person (a woman, at least they get that right) comes on the line. She hasn't a clue either. A few hours pass. The phone rings. Yes, she says, she has now found out about it. I try to put this tactfully. Surely, I say, if BP wants to be green, it would make more sense to spend the money and pay for proper outside environmental experts? She is shocked. "We *are* green," she says, promising to send me BP's brochure on sound environmental management. "We are doing this merely to see if there is anything we've missed."●

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A few of our favourite kings

How much longer can the despised dynasties of the Gulf states continue to rule, now that the Kuwait monarchy has gone? Dilip Hiro reveals how they keep their power and how their world will look, post-Saddam

Last week at the Carlton Club casino in Cannes, Sheikh Eyani, an adviser to Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia, lost £8.8 million at the roulette tables. He immediately wrote a cheque to settle two thirds of the debt. The story flatters every cheap caricature of the super-rich Arab princeling, and adds a new note of fiddling while the Gulf burns. But with the US, Britain and their local allies just a skirmish away from war with Iraq, we need to recall one truth about the *status quo* Saddam Hussein threatens. The sheikh is in the casino because the western powers put him there, and kept him there. When the dust of battle clears, a restoration of "business as usual" will mean more grotesque inequality, more resentment and, in time, another Saddam to voice the anger of the Arab poor.

The Gulf region contains 54 per cent of the world's known oil reserves. Ensuring cheap access to this energy source for the west and Japan has formed a pillar of US Middle Eastern policy since the second world war. The others have been support for the state of Israel and hostility to Soviet influence. These aims have meant shoring up the widely despised ruling dynasties of Saudi Arabia and five smaller states: Kuwait, Oman, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Meanwhile, western arms, trade and diplomatic muscle have allowed the oligarchs to freeze their lands' political life and strangle dissent at birth.

Until this month, the strategy had seemed to pay a handsome dividend. By summer 1990, the inflation-adjusted price of oil had dropped to the equivalent of its 1972 level. In short, a barrel of crude was as cheap as in the days before the OPEC-led "oil shocks" of 1973-74 and 1978-79. Then Iraq turned against the principal quota-buster and price-cutter, its ally and banker in the war against Iran—Kuwait.

Even there, where the al-Sabahs ran the least vicious of the region's family businesses, the national assembly had been suspended for four years prior to the invasion. Of 1.9 million Kuwaiti residents, only 750,000 had citizenship rights. Of these, only 60,000 males were allowed to vote.

By way of compensation, all Kuwaitis enjoyed a lavishly funded welfare state with free health care and guaranteed male employment. Yet, the al-Sabahs, creatures of their British protectors until independence in 1961 and firm friends thereafter, found it hard to establish the legitimacy of their rule. Much of the opposition to them came from pro-Iranian Shi'ites; in 1985 one group tried to assassinate the Emir. While calling for Iraqi withdrawal, the Tehran government has studiously failed to demand his return.

It was pressure from Saudi Arabia, also fearful of Islamic militancy, that helped push Kuwait into suspending its rudimentary parliament. The house of Saud has never bothered with such niceties. Yet the kingdom now at the heart of "Operation Desert Shield", and so publicly embarrassed by the US troops on its Arab soil, has courted and won American favour from the moment of its birth. The tribal leader Abdul Aziz ibn Abdul Rahman al Saud finished his conquest of a swathe of former Ottoman lands in 1932. He worked fast: by 1933 the Standard Oil Company of California gained concessions for £50,000 in gold as an advance against future oil royalties. Thus he broke the regional pattern which had seen all concessions until then granted to British companies.

US oil firms and their government have stood at the shoulder of the Saudi autocrats ever since. Their support has been reciprocated. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, King Khalid, "Protector of the Holy Shrines" of Islam, allowed the US to store arms and ammunition on his territory. Saudi gratitude went further. During the Irangate scandal, Congress refused the Reagan administration funding for the Contra guerrillas in Nicaragua. So CIA director Bill Casey went to see the Saudi ambassador, who wrote a personal cheque for US$1 million for the Contra account in Switzerland and promised another every month. And for a quarter-century, from 1962 to 1986, the oil minister Sheikh Ahmad Zaki Yamani belied his cartoon image as a blackmailer of motorists by seeking to protect western interests in the Gulf.

Senior Saudi princes have made hundreds of millions of dollars from kickbacks on contracts given to western firms. The pickings are richest in the field of weapons procurement, where the Saudis have spent on a grand scale since western prodding led to the creation of the "Gulf Cooperation Council" in the early stages of the Iran-Iraq war. A recent package awarded to British defence companies amounted to £17 billion, the largest-ever single weapons deal. King Fahd's invitation to the infidel armies simply made visible a long history of mutual aid.

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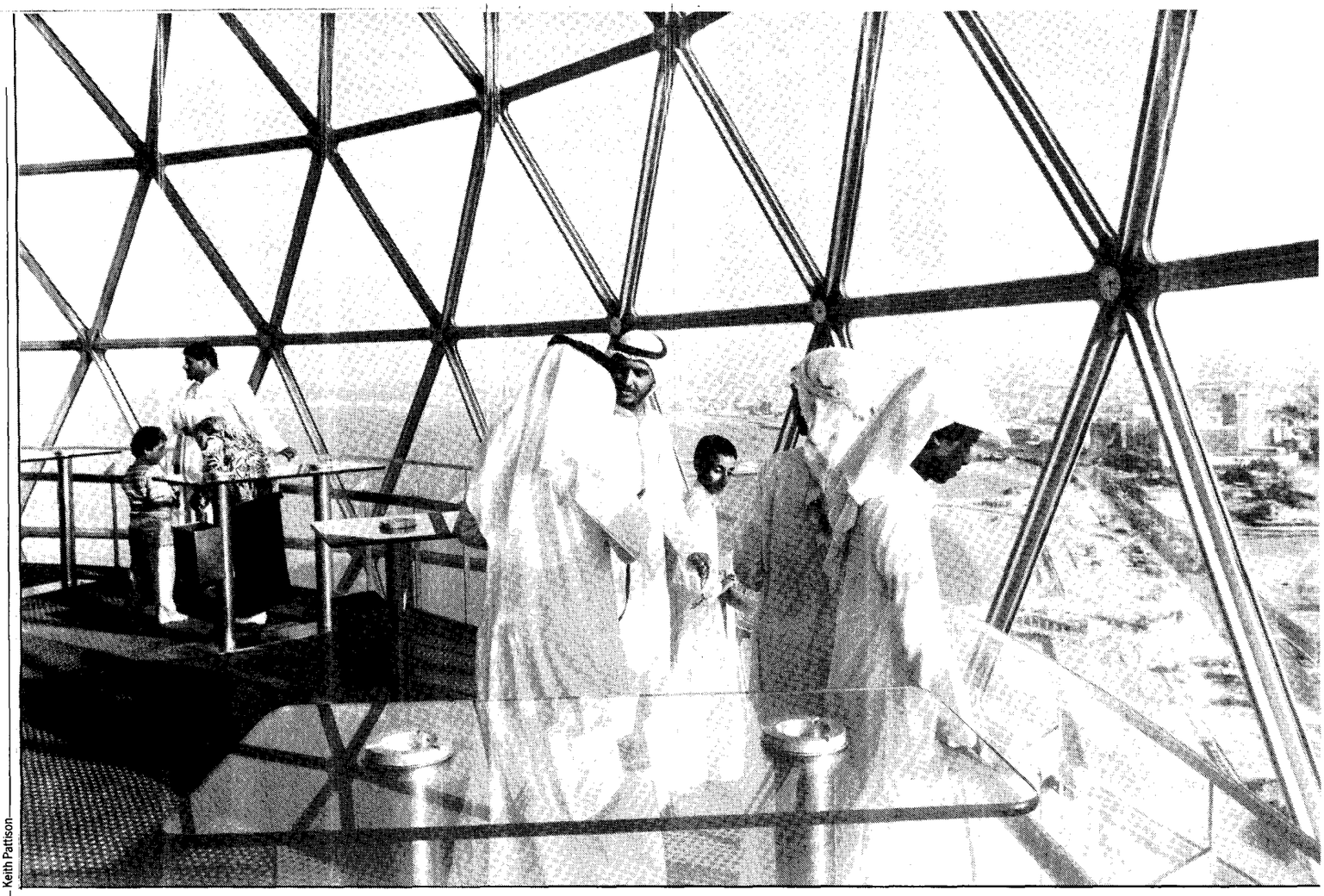

Keith Pattison

Visitors from Saudi Arabia view Kuwait City from the Kuwait tower; the Saudis pressured the country into suspending its parliament

Yet even the despotic Sauds have cause to fear the instability that a Saddam, or a Khomeini, can arouse. The then king beat off demands for a constitutional monarchy from the progressive "Free Princes" in the early 1960s, and in 1979 Islamic republican guerrillas seized the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Fear of further discontent led the royal family to enforce Islamic law more strictly through the "Ulema" court of Koranic scholars. The rulers also promised an elected "constitutional assembly". Nothing came of it. But the standard torture of detainees by the *falaqa* (beating the soles of the feet), and occasional amputation or beheading for convicted criminals, remain all too real.

The smaller states now thrust into the front line all bear the marks of British influence. This dates from the late 19th century, when the opening of the Suez canal led the Empire to protect each stage of the passage to India. Formal independence for all except Kuwait came in 1971. Informal control has never ceased. In Oman, a likely base for air strikes against Iraqi forces in Kuwait, the Foreign Office helped engineer the overthrow in 1970 of the ultra-orthodox Sultan Said by his son, Prince Qaboos. British military advisers continue to run the army, while US forces have used harbours and airports since a pact with the Sultan in 1980.

Other territories repeat the pattern of vast oil reserves, a tiny ruling class, a non-citizen populace of expatriates and susceptibility to outside pressure. The archipelago of Bahrain, with virtually no oil of its own left, is an exception. Its 400,000 population now depends on off-shore banking and leisure facilities for the Saudi and foreign élites. Alone among Gulf states, it permits the legal consumption of alcohol. It also gives a home to the permanent US forces in the Middle East. They occupy a naval base formerly used by the British.

The United Arab Emirates best displays the syndrome of short-sighted greed and foreign domination that so inflamed

A CIA director went to see the Saudi ambassador, who wrote a personal cheque for $1 million for the Contras

Saddam. With a minute native population (only one in eight of the 1.5 million inhabitants), the rulers of oil-rich Abu Dhabi, Dubai and Sharjah seem intent on pumping out as much of their 97.7 billion barrels of reserves as they can. With Kuwait, they helped drive down the price of crude and thus antagonise Iraq, which has about the same stock of oil but 80 times as many permanent mouths to feed.

In the last decade, Iran's Islamic purists, and now the pan-Arab nationalists of Iraq, have menaced the Gulf dynasties with the prospect of popular wrath. Both religious and secular radicals have denounced their corruption and enslavement to the west. Hardware and expertise from "decadent" America and Europe have indeed let the families dig their heels into the sand. Their oil wealth is no more fairly distributed now than in 1958, when the Saudis first bothered to separate the royal house's private income from the revenue of the state.

Washington and London have so far refrained for two reasons from pushing the monarchs towards political pluralism. First, it is much simpler to deal with six ruling families than the varied personalities and policies thrown up by a democratic system. Second, elected governments would feel the winds of Arab and Islamic militancy, and veer away from the west.

Whether Saddam is overthrown, or saves his skin by retreat from Kuwait, his western enemies will face the first

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Keith Pattison

Kuwait still bears marks of British influence: scene from the oil township of Ahmadi, originally a popular ex-pat suburb

In Oman, the Foreign Office helped engineer the overthrow of the ultra-orthodox Sultan Said by his son

test of their attitude to political change in the Gulf. If a pan-Arab force were to occupy Kuwait with the Baghdad regime intact, the way would be open for a referendum on the fate of the monarchy. Yasser Arafat and Colonel Gadhafi suggested this option in their abortive peace plan.

But if, as now looks more probable, a bloody conflict ends in the downfall of Saddam, a grateful west would hastily restore Sheikh Jaber al Ahmad al Sabah to his palace. He has served the west well, and the Kuwait Investment Organisation has ploughed US$100 billion into western firms. (Its holdings include around 10 per cent of BP and Midland Bank.)

Restoration would be the scenario to please the western nations most. Yet it would not solve the underlying problem: the fragility of the Gulf monarchies, which together possess 34 per cent of global oil reserves. Whatever happens, they can never return to the era before 2 August 1990. This date will be seen by future historians as a milestone. It marks the beginning of the end for these remnants of feudalism in a region that until now has thrown an economic lifeline to the world's leading capitalist countries. ●

THE PALESTINIANS

Backs to the wall

Does the PLO support Saddam? Stephen Howe talks to its top officials to find out

War in the Middle East is now inevitable. Not necessarily a United States *blitzkrieg* against Iraq—or not only that—but waves of violence spreading both within and between states. No regime is secure, no border inviolable. And whoever the winners may be in the coming cataclysm, there is certain to be one big loser: the Palestinians.

By supporting the Iraqi dictator in his aggression against another Arab state, it is said, the PLO has wrecked its chances of ever achieving a homeland. It has undone all the sympathy and cancelled the diplomatic credit it had won worldwide. So runs the west's indictment of the PLO, with barely a dissenting voice. Why on earth did Arafat do it? And is there any way out for the organisation now?

PLO officials don't even try to hide their depression and confusion. But they insist that their position has been grossly distorted by their enemies. True, the PLO refused to join the Arab League majority in condemning the invasion; and would not support the sending of Arab troops to Saudi Arabia. But Bassam Abu Sharif, Arafat's aide and closest confidant, maintains that this doesn't mean they endorse Saddam's actions. "The PLO is against any invasion or occupation as a matter of principle," he says. "We are not siding with Iraq, or anyone else."

The organisation has, he claims, been conducting intensive "silent diplomacy" ever since the build-up of tension began in the Gulf. Arafat visited Kuwait before the invasion, bearing messages from Saddam Hussein and attempting to engineer a compromise between Iraq and Kuwait. "We are the only mediators left in the Middle East," claims Abu Sharif. World opinion should see the need to leave "at least a margin for someone to mediate"—instead of demanding total allegiance to the anti-Iraqi crusade. The fact that Saddam even sent a delegation to the Cairo summit, useless though its presence was, was the result of Arafat's urging.

How, though, can this language of diplomacy be squared with Arafat's reported announcement on Iraqi television that "Our guns are your guns", or with the Palestinian demonstrators in Jordan and Gaza pledging their "lives and souls" to the Iraqi dictator? Seeking to explain this, Abu Sharif shifts into a very different rhetoric: one of revolution. He says that the upheaval in the Arab world, which includes enthusiasm for Saddam and challenges to the power of the oil

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sheikhs, is at one with that in eastern Europe: a drive for democracy among the Arab masses. "This is a time for democracy, for freedom and the redistribution of wealth!"

This begins to sound very like a return to the ideas of Palestinian Marxists in the 1970s, those who advocated the overthrow of all the existing Arab regimes and believed that the road to Palestine led through Amman and Damascus. But isn't Saddam a grotesquely inappropriate rallying point for such feelings? Abu Sharif is impatient with the question. He points angrily to the west's hypocrisy, not only in its long failure to act against Israeli occupation as it now moves against Iraq, but also in allying with Syria's President Assad. We have suddenly remembered Saddam's slaughter of his own Kurdish people, and equally suddenly forgotten Assad's destruction of Hama. The west, he charges, only wants to safeguard its economic and strategic concerns.

Abu Sharif has travelled a long and painful political road. He was deputy leader of George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the most intransigent of the major Palestinian organisations and responsible for some of the seventies' worst terrorist attacks. In 1972, an Israeli letter bomb blasted three fingers from his right hand and partially blinded him. His face bears the marks of massive plastic surgery. Yet, in recent years, Abu Sharif has not only broken with Habash and moved to become Arafat's closest aide: he has also emerged as the most conciliatory of the PLO chiefs, the leading proponent of dialogue with Israel.

It was he who first publicly mooted PLO recognition of the Jewish state, in a *Washington Post* article and memorandum to the US State Department in May 1988.

He has been a constant presence at PLO meetings with Israeli leftists. But today Abu Sharif talks like a man whose back is against the wall. The dialogues with the US and with Israeli doves, already severely strained by PLO refusal to condemn recent attacks on Israeli civilians, are now in ruins. One senior Israeli politician of the left phoned Abu Sharif in the middle of the night last week: How can you do this to us?

Afif Safieh, the PLO's new London representative, is blunt and bitter on that point. He has, he says, devoted 15 years of his life to diplomacy, and it has got him and his people precisely nowhere. He has seen the PLO make concession after concession, to the stage where its demands became "unreasonably reasonable". Safieh will not quite say that the diplomatic option is dead: but he is open in his fears that, if war breaks out, the pressures within the PLO for a resumption of military attacks will prove irresistible. In other words, the US-Iraqi confrontation may well precipitate the long-feared escalation of the *intifada* from stones to guns and bombs—with God knows what Israeli response.

Safieh is one of the PLO's rising stars: a charming, articulate, multilingual 40 year old who was until last week the organisation's spokesman in The Hague. Safieh's background is sedate—as he cheerfully says, he feels no need to "renounce terrorism", since he's never shot at anyone in his life—and freighted with academic distinction. Yet his political stance is markedly less moderate than Abu Sharif's. He was, he says, always sceptical that Israel could be persuaded, rather than coerced, into a settlement.

In sum, the Palestinians seem eager to explain what their organisation is trying to do; far less happy to talk about why. For all their indubitable evasiveness, their complaint that they've been misrepresented has force.

PLO spokesmen are keen also to emphasise the yawning gap between international near-inactivity over Israeli occupation and the rush to damn Saddam over Kuwait. There, too, they have a point, albeit one they are overplaying. They are certainly in tune with much Arab opinion—far more so than are the Egyptian, Syrian or Saudi leaders— as indicated by their hostility to the US presence and suspicion about its motives. The PLO is seemingly correct also to argue that the 10 August Cairo resolution condemning Iraq and sending troops to Saudi is not binding: only 12 of the 21 Arab League members supported it. So far, the PLO stance is reasonable, if not laudable.

What PLO spokesmen cannot or will not explain is why the organisation's attacks on everyone else's hypocrisy have, these past days, come to be matched by a pervasive cant of its own. It has kept its criticism of Iraq to the level of innocuous generalities, while making no consistent effort to discourage popular Palestinian idolisation of Saddam: an admiration born of desperation, but still utterly destructive of any coherent Palestinian political strategy.

Secret instructions from PLO headquarters in Tunis to their representatives in east Jerusalem have urged them to damp down pro-Iraqi demonstrations; but in Amman, PLO representatives have been leading similar rallies. In US and Israeli eyes—and maybe now those of some Arab leaders too—people so blind or indifferent to Saddam's crimes simply cannot be trustworthy negotiating partners.

Economic dependence on Iraq certainly can't account for this seemingly self-destructive pose. The organisation's accounts have always been pretty murky, but it is estimated that Iraq supplies, at most, 15 per cent of the funds it receives from Arab governments; less than 5 per cent of its total income. Kuwait and Saudi Arabia together have been donating almost four times as much; not to mention the thousands of Palestinian families dependent on relatives' earnings from employment in Kuwait. Nor is any major PLO group politically dependent on Iraq. Saddam has in his pocket only Abul Abbas's PLF—a tiny faction whose attacks on civilians have been a constant embarrassment to Arafat —and part of Abu Nidal's breakaway following, whose relation with the mainstream PLO is one of mutual hatred.

The answer to the puzzle of the PLO's stance may be that its leadership is simply too weak to resist pressures from within the organisation, which demand action, of almost any kind, as a distraction from the pain of powerlessness. Arafat has spent so many years juggling factions, appeasing the temporarily powerful and the potentially threatening—among his own followers and in the Arab states—that he has lost any capacity to forfeit immediate and largely verbal gains for the sake of more distant objectives.

One Israeli politician of the left phoned Abu Sharif last week, almost pleading: How can you do this to us?

There must now be a huge question mark over his future. For the first time, even loyal Fatah members are beginning to talk about life after Arafat. The old man, it is whispered, is losing his grip. He is reported to have come under bitter attack within the PLO executive for his uncritical attitude toward Saddam. But who else can aspire to Palestinian leadership? None of the PLO leaders to whom I have spoken will admit that they are worried that the Hamas movement of Palestine's fundamentalists will threaten their position. The PLO's major justification, of course, is that they alone represent the Palestinians, but their unconcern is genuine.

But the tidal wave of enthusiasm for Saddam might sweep away the aspirant younger generation of "internal" leaders as well as the older ones in exile. The leaders within the Territories—men like Faisal Husseini and Sari Nusseibehh —have staked their reputations and futures at least as heavily on prospects of negotiation as have the external Fatah chiefs. Abu Sharif appeals as passionately as ever for a dialogue: "I want to tell Israelis that we remain seriously committed to our initiative for peace. Despite all the drums of war, we think this is the time to step forward and talk." I suspect he knows, though, that the "drums of war" are drowning his voice, as far ahead as he or I can see. ●

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Caroline Penn

LABOUR

Kent's new cockneys

Strawberry picking in Kent used to be a cockney tradition. Sarah Baxter finds Sikhs, Czechs and Poles in the picking fields of Mockbeggar Farm

Last summer's heatwave cost Mockbeggar Farm near Rochester, Kent, more than £100,000 in damaged fruit. Strawberries and raspberries ripened in the sun and went squashy before the farmhands could pick them. Machinery could not replace fast, gentle fingers and it proved impossible to attract enough casual labour at the usual low rates in the affluent south-east. In any case, Peter Brice, the farm's co-director, was fed up with the quality of local recruits, who would only turn up for work if and when they felt like it. "Some of them, particularly the young, were such yobs. It was terrible. You have no idea how ghastly it was. It made me so ashamed of being British," he says.

There was a time, he recalls, when, "You could get any amount of labour you wanted. People liked to earn a bit of spare cash in the summer and there wouldn't be any bother from the Inland Revenue." Family legend has it that an usher from the House of Lords spent his annual holidays picking fruit at Mockbeggar.

South London cockneys used to flock to Kent with their families, exchanging slum housing for a month's "freedom" working from dawn to dusk in the fresh air. Their living conditions alarmed social commentators: "They sleep... almost like cattle in the field," wrote the Reverend J J

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Kendon in 1860. "To mingle with these poor creatures, to see their habits and hear their language...makes it seem almost impossible that we can be living in the 19th century."

This year, Mockbeggar Farm—one of Marks & Spencer's and Safeway's leading soft-fruit suppliers—has turned to immigrants and guestworkers for cheap, pliant labour. The plump fruit from the "garden of England" on sale at our local supermarkets is likely to have been picked 24 hours earlier by Sikh workers and east European students. The Sikhs are bussed in from Gravesend at 6am to pick strawberries, while pitched beside the raspberry field are a dozen caravans crammed with Czech and Polish students.

"There are some farms round here," says Peter Brice, "which only employ Indian labour. We've normally had English gangs and we were a little reluctant to break the mould. I don't mind telling you I was a little nervous, because in a small community, some people can be racist." But Brice is delighted with both groups of workers: the Sikhs, he says, are highly reliable, while the students are a charming and enthusiastic "captive labour force", on hand to work overtime at a moment's notice.

The two gangs of labour don't mix. "I've never met anyone from the Asian gang," says Ivan Spirakus, a 24-year-old mechanical engineering student from Prague. "We only see them when they go to get their payment." He is one of the farm gang's few English speakers; the new recruits, whether Asian or Caucasian, communicate exclusively in their native languages.

The Sikh labourers have been recruited by Avtar Singh, "the nearest thing," observes Peter Brice, "to an old-fashioned gang master. We say we want 20, 30 or 40 pickers by tomorrow and he finds them." Avtar Singh hires friends, neighbours and relatives; arranges transport (taking ten, for a fee, in his own Transit van); and oversees operations in the field with a firm hand. "The farm needs people, the people need work, and I'm the man in the middle," he says proudly.

Asians from the Medway and Thames estuary have become Kent's new "cockneys", supplying up to 80 per cent of farm labour. They are almost all Sikhs from the Punjab, the wheatgrowing "granary of India", who came to south-east England in the mid- to late 1960s under the "voucher" scheme. The partition of the Punjab between India and Pakistan created three million refugees, putting enormous pressure on the traditionally prosperous local economy. Gravesend, a ferry ride away from the Tilbury Docks—the former home of the East India Company—was known to offer plentiful work to newcomers. The myth of return among the older generation remains strong: Gravesend, with an Asian community of 15,000, has become a thriving centre of Sikh nationalism and home to the Khalistan (independent Punjab) government-in-exile.

The men arrived first, working in riverside factories, living in cramped hostels and sending money back home. Kalwant Wasu was one of the first women to come to Gravesend in 1967. "It was men, men, men, everywhere," she says. "Three, four, five, six of them living together." The wives who followed their husbands to Britain were not expected to work. "There was a woman in a tin factory whom everyone gossiped about."

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Gravesend's industry began to close and work began to lose its taboo for women. Many of their husbands went on to establish prosperous small businesses, often helped by the cash they brought home from the fields. Some women work on piece rates for 12 hours a day, seven days a week, from March to October: if the hours are long enough and their fingers are nimble, they can supplement the family wage by £300 a week.

Farm work, they say, may be poorly paid, but it is preferable to slaving in Gravesend's sweat shops and back-room shoe factories. As one 51-year-old woman worker told me through an interpreter, "My good friends are there, the money is there and we're out in the fresh air. I don't like wintertime, when there's no work, no money, the weather is bad and I'm bored."

At Mockbeggar Farm this year, the Sikh gang has only had enough work for an eight-hour day. They would rather work overtime and welcomed the arrival of rain last week, which will increase the crop and extend the strawberry

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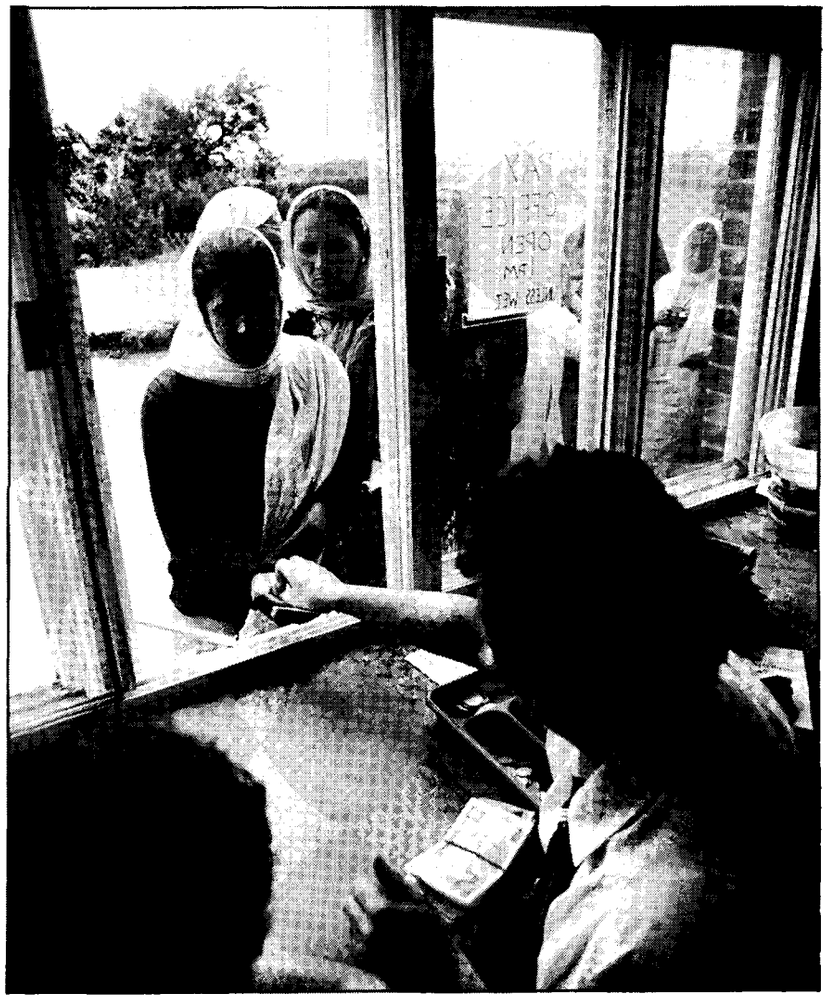

Family legend has it that an usher from the House of Lords spent his annual holidays picking fruit at Mockbeggar

season. Few of the workers stop for the two paid, ten-minute tea breaks, preferring the opportunity to pick more fruit. No one takes the officially permitted, unpaid half-hour lunch break. "I say, 'Well, I don't mind if you don't want it,'" says Avtar Singh. "They can always save the time and go home earlier. It's a mutual understanding. There are no hard and fast rules."

There are a handful of Sikh men scattered in the fields, most of whom are past retirement age or have lost their jobs. Gurbakhsh Singh Sivia, 58, worked as a postman, storekeeper and teacher before taking a job in a Gravesend paper mill. He was made redundant earlier this year when the company changed hands. "I used to get £235 for a 37-hour week when I was a paper-tester. I can't even make £150 picking strawberries six days a week. All the men are like me, they're doing it as a last resort. But I'm happy to do it, because in spite of my best efforts, I couldn't get another job. The money is good if you haven't got anything else."

Singh Sivia grumbles that the ground is too hard and dry, "which makes my knees sore," and that "the only alternative, bending over, is too painful for me." His father, however, owned a smallholding in the Punjab and he is no stranger to the work. "When people say, 'What are you doing?' I say, 'I'm back in my inherited profession.' It's nothing awkward or new, or something I don't know. I enjoy it this way. Two of my brothers are still farming in India."

Singh Sivia is meticulous about his paperwork and reports all his earnings to the Inland Revenue. He suspects, sometimes, that he is a bit too honest. When he lost his job and applied for income support, he was asked if he had savings of over £6,000. "I said 'yes' proudly, and since then I've had to drain all my money just to make ends meet."

Mockbeggar Farm pays cash in hand: there are no unions in the field, and no need to trouble with income tax or national insurance. The Asian fruit pickers are not even known by their names, only numbers, as the farm's white-collar staff complained that they couldn't spell them. Peter Brice, however, is obliged to pass on the names and addresses of workers to the Inland Revenue and, the day before my arrival, the Department of Social Security had swooped on the farm looking for moonlighters. "There have been times when they've come unannounced into the fields with cameras and people dive for cover," says Brice. "Fair enough, why should we pay benefits to people who are working on the side?"

In the raspberry fields, the Czech and Polish students had just learned that they would have to pay tax on their meagre income. There was uproar. Every pound to the Inland Revenue means less hard currency to take home. In three months, the time allowed by his work permit, Ivan Spirakus hopes to save £700. That is more than his father, an engineer, and his mother, a post-office clerk, earn in a year.

Mockbeggar Farm received over 500 applications from Czechoslovaks seeking work under the government-sanctioned Harvest Opportunities Permit Scheme (HOPS). This year, the Home Office doubled the number of foreign students allowed into the country to 4,000, specifically to cater for eastern Europeans, many of whom have been allowed abroad for the first time. Peter Brice pays the standard agricultural piece rates so, like the Sikhs, they earn roughly £130, getting extra for overtime whenever they can. Some farmers stick to the government-imposed minimum: £102.83 for over 20s and £78.13 for 18 year olds.

So keen are the students to save money that food parcels from abroad regularly arrive at the farm. They live, for free, squashed in caravans, which sleep 4-6 people. "Sometimes," says Ivan Spirakus, "we're too tired at the end of the day to have fun." They spend their evenings writing letters and playing the occasional spot of football. A few romances have blossomed and they have found the time to hitch-hike to London and Canterbury on sight-seeing trips. But just as often, says Spirakus, "people stick to their caravans and don't talk to each other. For most of the people here, it's the first time they can make such big money, and they get jealous if people pick faster or can earn more overtime. It's not good to talk of these things but it's true."

They had thought they would be working alongside English-speaking gangs and are disappointed not to have learned more English. "We've learned words like the raspberries are 'too green', 'too dark', 'too squashy' and 'Can you change your punnets, please?'" says Spirakus. They feel bitter when a field is poor and they can't pick enough fruit to make the piece rates worthwhile. But they are indebted to Peter Brice for making the work possible.

The Sikhs and the east Europeans have persuaded Peter Brice that they are the perfect, docile labour force. But he still hankers nostalgically for a traditionally "English" workforce—as ruddy-faced as the apples in Kent's orchards. The new farmhands, he believes, are merely an excellent substitute. "The person I'm really looking for is the young married woman, because she's got the right touch, she's hungry and she wants to earn some money. She doesn't want to sit around gossiping," he says. "She", however, is more likely to be found among the Sikh women in his fields, than the old cockney labour gangs. ●

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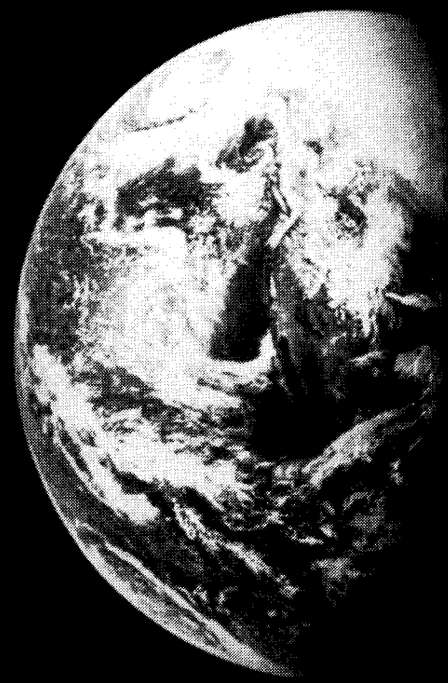

The Daily Telegraph

You'd do well to read it

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LETTERS

The city of culture

So "the City of Culture is being milked dry", according to James Kelman ("Storm in the Palace", 3 August). Of course it isn't, though it's hardly surprising to us to read yet another misinformed and extremist interpretation of Glasgow's European Cultural Capital year from Mr Kelman. He and his so-called "Workers City" associates seem determined not to learn about the true nature, significance or objectives of this extremely important and successful year.

Despite the fact that they care to know nothing of the principles, methods and aims of this office and the working relationships it has established with over 400 Glasgow arts and cultural organisations in the last three years; despite the fact that 1990 has so far succeeded because of the hard work, determination and skill of hundreds of their fellow-artists and cultural workers living in communities here; despite the fact that 1990 has delivered an extraordinary capital legacy for Glaswegians in the shape of new and refurbished buildings and facilities for the arts; and despite the fact that its impact on the city's confidence, its image, its future vision for the arts and their development is beyond anything in the experience of a British city, they insist on rubbishing the entire exercise from a position of self-inflicted ignorance.

It's self-inflicted, since of all the factual errors contained in Mr Kelman's piece, the allegations of Glasgow district council's secrecy over 1990 funding and management are the most serious. They must be flatly refuted. He talks of "revelations concerning the actual costs of European Cultural Capital year". There have been no such "revelations". The council declared, publicly and properly over two years ago, that it had set aside a special fund of up to £15 million to support the year and its preparations. 1990 remains within that budget. Subsequently, all grant aid, support and assistance from that fund has been publicised openly upon council's approval. Kelman's claim that "as much as 10 per cent of the general services budget has been 'milked' from *every* [his italics] council department in Glasgow except housing to pay for the 'cultural celebration'" is a fantasy.

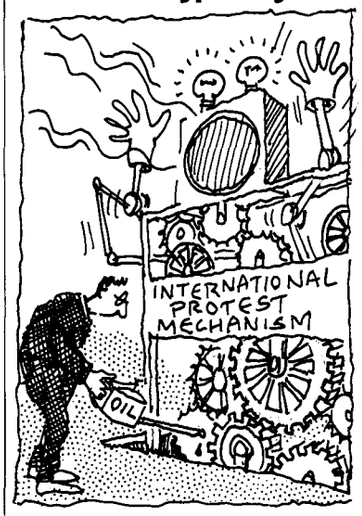
Unlike the gigantic corporate effort which 1990 has inspired among the arts and cultural and business communities, Kelman and his tiny group of colleagues have no democratic base upon which to substantiate their often insulting statements and interpretations. Glasgow's Glasgow is dismissed as "a critical disaster". Is it? An exhibition whose nature and scale has never been attempted in Britain? An exhibition which has just attracted its 269,000th visitor in under four months, putting it among the top 7 per cent of Europe's museums and galleries? Hailed as a great achievement by a large number of influential and experienced critics, and by 97 per cent of the visitors in an independent exit survey?

The author, quoted as saying that Glasgow's writers and critics were "an embarrassment to this city and all of its cultural workforce", said nothing of the kind and James Kelman knows it. But the persistent uninformed criticism of the 1990 programme by the Workers City group is. Because as far as possible we have shared the authorship of the programme with the organisations and people who made the title possible in the first place. If that is calumnied, without any reference to what is really happening, the city's artistic reputation is too.

Of course James Kelman is rightly concerned about larger political issues of accountability and risks to Glasgow's cultural heritage, but does he seriously believe that 1990 is also a threat to them? Do sweeping assumptions about demolition in the Gorbals, the redevelopment of Glasgow Green, the sale of assets for capital receipts (needed to help protect the city from the poll tax and Thatcher's attack on the power of local government), the modest charges needed to help fund the (newly refurbished for 1990) McLellan Galleries' exhibitions which wouldn't otherwise happen, the ineptitude and cultural illiteracy which he detects within this office—do these add up to some anti-socialist, undemocratic conspiracy? Of course not— they're simply lumped together in an attempt to thicken up watery protests. And that, ultimately, is the real tragedy. Instead of keeping alive the grand, angry tradition of eloquent dissent with which this city fired the whole country's labour movement for at least a generation, they, a great Scottish author among them, resort to mere pamphleteering from a Glasgow pub.

Robert Palmer, Director
Neil Wallace, Depute Director
Glasgow 1990 Festivals Office

The west's hypocrisy



How refreshing it is to find the United Nations almost unanimously condemning the invasion of a small country by a powerful neighbour, and calling for mandatory sanctions with implicit military back-up. A trifle hypocritical, though. Where were the mass denunciations and calls for mandatory sanctions against the US when it invaded Grenada and Panama? Or when it mined Nicaragua's harbours and ran the "Contra" terrorists, and cocked a snook at the World Court's decision?

The rhetoric coming out of Washington and London lauds the UN's condemnation of Iraq, calling them "international bandits" and declaring that "naked aggression" will not be allowed to succeed. That is what they say; but what they mean is, not when western interests are seriously threatened. Compare the present rhetoric with that bandied about when Indonesia invaded East Timor in 1975; there was no rhetoric. When asked the day after the invasion to comment, US President Ford smiled, and said: "We'll talk about that later." Six months before Indonesia's invasion, Britain's Ambassador to Jakarta, Sir John Ford, sent a classified letter to the Foreign Office, saying that in his view it was "in Britain's interest that Indonesia should absorb the territory as soon and as unobtrusively as possible; and that if it came to the crunch and there is a row in the United Nations we should keep our heads down and avoid siding against the Indonesian Government". Daniel Moynihan, at the time of Indonesia's invasion the US Ambassador to the UN, explained proudly in his memoirs: "The United States wished things to turn out as they did (in East Timor and Western Sahara) and worked to bring this about. The Department of State desired that the UN prove utterly ineffective in whatever measures it undertook. This task was given to me, and I carried it forward with no inconsiderable success."

And isn't it interesting that the west is willing to go to war against Iraq when it invades a small, rich, pro-western country (even the US cannot claim to be supporting "democracy" by its defence of Saudi and Kuwaiti feudal systems), yet when Iraq used chemical weapons against Iran, and even more brutally against its own Kurdish minority, there was no crusade against it. Blood may be thicker than water, but not thicker than oil, it would seem.

Paul Barbara
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Uncomfortable truths

The letter of J D Rimington, director general of the Health and Safety Executive ("Health and safety", 10 August), fails to respond to the main point of my article—that the police never undertake a manslaughter investigation into the conduct of senior managers and directors of companies after deaths in the workplace. Even when the DPP was forced to examine the merits of Paul Elvin's case (see Maria Manning's article, "Like it or lump it", 10 August), he did so on HSE evidence alone. His decision not to press charges was all too predictable.

The police may "make their own investigation" but this is only to ensure that the worker had not, for example, been pushed off a scaffold where a murder investigation is appropriate. As soon as the police officer finds out the worker died because the scaffold was dangerous —that is, an industrial "accident"— after a few photographs and "formal" statements from eye-witnesses, the officer will disappear and leave the investigation to the HSE inspector.

Mr Rimington implies that individuals can be imprisoned if found guilty of causing a death by breaching health and safety law. Not only is this not true (a fine *is* the only punishment), even if all of last year's 36 prosecutions against individuals were after fatal incidents (which I very much doubt), this would mean that in over 90 per cent of those workplace deaths caused by management failures, no individual

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manager or director was charged.

It may be difficult to establish the guilt of individual managers—but I doubt that is why the HSE prosecute so few of them. Even if the HSE were sincere in its rhetoric of prosecutorial enforcement—it just does not have the funds, and hence time, to implement it. Mr Rimington should be honest and admit, as have many of the factory inspectors I have talked to, that the HSE just does not have the capacity to prosecute responsible directors or managers in the Crown Court; only the corporate entity in the Magistrates' Court.

A prohibition notice after a fatal incident should be no alternative to a prosecution; why should culpable executives never have to suffer the criminal stigma that attaches to similar conduct *outside* the workplace? And, with over 300 seriously injured Channel Tunnel workers since December 1989, and not one prosecution against Transmanche Link, perhaps he is the one "giving...comfort to employers" —not me.

A minor correction: manslaughter liability is defined in the ordinary criminal law, not Health and Safety at Work Act.

David Bergman
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THIS ENGLAND

£5 book tokens for entries printed. (Postcards please)

● Eton's Head Master, Eric Anderson, said Eton today tries to strike a balance between science, maths, computing and economics, and the more traditional history and classics. "You can sum them up pictorially almost by looking at a boy wearing a white bow tie and gown sitting at a computer."—*Guardian* (Angela Bibb)

● Gary Fishlock, 28, won an appeal against his three-year sentence for his involvement in violence in the Jolly Gardener pub in Mortlake, south-west London, after the Appeal Court ruled he had an understandable sense of grievance because he was the only person involved to be jailed.—*Guardian* (E D Foxon)

● They stay out there until they're ready to be slaughtered. We don't cut their teeth and nails. We don't feed them additives and, on the whole, don't use drugs. We use homoeopathic medicines. I'm very proud of my pigs. They're great fun, very succulent meat.—*Observer* (Megan Rees)

FRINGE BENEFITS

Skinny dipping

Colin Ward

My assignation with a mountain of old picture postcards (see last week's *Fringe Benefits*) revealed a huge change within a lifetime in our attitude towards the sun. The favourite place for sending cards was the seaside, a cult which grew up when the fashionable aristocracy, as it tired of Bath, Leamington or Harrogate, was persuaded that a better "cure" was not only immersion in, but also drinking of, sea water.

Hence the bathing machine. These were white-painted wooden sheds on wheels, each with an attendant, in which the occupants undressed while a horse towed them out to sea. There the "dipper" held on to them and plunged them under water, like a Pentacostal Baptist minister. They lasted, horseless and beached under the promenade, well into the 1930s.

One survival of the Victorian assumption that the sea was a natural disinfectant was the discharge of untreated sewage into it, which results in today's assumptions that most of our beaches are unsafe and that you shouldn't eat shellfish caught on 200 miles of the east coast. But, of course, in those days the resident population in fishing ports and harbours was small, and none of the locals would dream of going voluntarily into the water.

Except for the boys. The Whitby photographer Frank Meadow Sutcliffe carefully posed them splashing around naked in 1886 and the then Prince of Wales had a big enlargement made to hang at Marlborough House. Local postcard makers followed this precedent to catch boys (never girls) in the river or pond, painting on swimming trunks if their genitals were exposed. In London, a favourite theme was of boys being chased by a policeman (or preferably a policewoman) out of the Serpentine lake in Hyde Park. No one drew the conclusion that swimming should be allowed there until 1930, when George Lansbury found that, as President of the Board of Works, he was in charge of the royal parks. Douglas Goldring recalled that "so mean was the attitude of the governing class that Lansbury had to fight tooth and nail against Tory obstruction to obtain for Londoners the right to bathe in their own Serpentine in their own park."

Back at the seaside the old postcards reveal that no one would consider the notion of undressing on the beach, and that in any case it was not thought healthy to expose your body to the sun. Nor was it thought that you would be any cooler through wearing fewer clothes. Hats were essential, if only to protect against sunstroke. The later fashion for sun-bathing would have been seen as not only perverse, but dangerous. At the most, fathers and sons would take off their shoes and socks, and roll up their trousers. Mothers and daughters would tuck their frocks and petticoats into their drawers and, with many a scream of excitement, would paddle in the advancing tide.

The cult of semi-nudity was, until the 1930s, an affectation of the intelligentsia, and of "progressive" groups, clubs and camps. The postcard evidence suggests that the arrival of the commercial holiday camp in the 1930s spread new assumptions down the social pyramid. Not women, but men, could be seen in topless bathing suits.

Most of us learn, in childhood or through experience, that our skin, our waterproof overcoat, is susceptible in different ways. Some of us tolerate exposure to the sun, for others it is a nightmare. The postcards from Edwardian days show that our great-grandparents protected all their children from the sun. A later generation ruthlessly exposed them all.

Now, perhaps fortunately, we have a new scare. Could a lifetime of sun-worship bring its toll in skin cancer? Fashionable people who spent enormously on suntan lotions in the past now buy preparations which give the same browning effect on white people, without the business of lying under the sun. Ordinary old postcards from far-away places show how, for example, the Bedouins wrapped themselves up to avoid the sun, or the slaves in the paddyfields of Asia had broad hats of rice-straw to give a little shade from its pitiless rays. It was natural for them all to keep out of the sun.

It was normal to avoid it. Look at the photos of a Victorian building site. The tradesmen are wearing flannel vests, woollen shirts, waistcoats, jackets and bowler hats. If you examine a country picture of the harvest, exactly the same is true. Clothes were an insulation against unwanted heat, except in the mines where the opposite applied. There, as the old Blue Books remind us, semi-naked men and women, boys and girls, worked together in the pit without any fear of the sun.

Just suppose that, as new fears about global warming arise, we were all induced, for the sake of our health, to stay away from exposure to the sun. We would only be repeating the wisdom of a whole generation of old picture postcards.

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Paul Bateman

Invasion of the turtles

Rosalind Coward discovers the charm of pizza-eating Donatello and Michelangelo

Depending on your perspective, England is either preparing for, or steeling itself against, the release of the film of **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** in November. In the US the film is already the highest-grossing independent film ever, and the cult is already well established here. Earlier this year, children's BBC ran the massively popular cartoon version, having insisted that it should be retitled *Hero Turtles* rather than *Ninja Turtles* to discourage children from taking up martial arts.

As every parent knows, the Turtles are the new craze, ousting the long-running Ghostbusters. A recent Mutant Turtle painting competition in the *Sun* attracted "tens of thousands" of entries, and toy shops report waiting lists for Turtle toys. "The sales are unbelievable," a spokeswoman at Hamleys says. "The models of the Turtles sell out as soon as they come in, and if we met every order as soon as new stocks arrived, we would have nothing to put in their place." The rap record, *Turtle Power*, is currently topping the singles chart.

Like the Ghostbusters, the Turtles are a bunch of do-gooding guys, wisecracking their way to victory, with an obligatory woman in tow. The Ghostbusters had Janine, their secretary; the Turtles have an ally in a woman TV reporter. Team spirit, jokiness and a superficial show of incompetence predominate. But there are crucial differences. Unlike the Ghostbusters, who began life as a small business initiative to improve the psychic environment of the city, the Turtles have a more bizarre background, and a clearer relationship to authority and leadership.

The myth begins with four ordinary pet turtles being accidentally tipped into the sewers, where they meet up with a blob of "retromuto-

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genic" slime which turns them into turtle-style adolescents, complete with a passion for pizza and banter borrowed from black and *chicano* cultures. They are taken in hand by a sewer rat called Splinter who names them after great artists and teaches them martial arts. This proves useful in their fight against the cohorts of a mastermind bent on taking over the world. The Turtles are capable of great feats, but, to the exasperation of "Master Splinter", behave rather irresponsibly as soon as they are off duty.

This combination of street talk, pizzaphilia, martial arts and a vague gesture towards global ecological catastrophe is a pretty zany concept. It sounds as though it were dreamt up in a late-night drinking session, which indeed it was. Part of its attraction undoubtedly lies in that zaniness: it takes a step further the modern children's cartoon culture of frantic borrowings and fragments from a culture the children can know little or nothing about. Can Donatello, Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo ever be taken seriously again?

Freud and Ernest Jones would have loved the joke. Both theorised art as the transformation of the basest into the loftiest; the Turtles represent its opposite: great artists as both sewer dwellers and the key ingredient in children's mass culture.

But the Turtles didn't start out that way. Having failed to sell their rather too original concept to the major comic publishing houses in 1983, the Turtles' inventors finally published their comic themselves—for the adult and teenage market rather than for children. It became a cult success, leading to some custom-made spin-off items.

The real Turtle explosion came in 1986, with a marketing deal with licensing agency, Surge. Toys came first and sold out quickly. Then came the children's cartoon series, simplifying and multiplying the format for a four- to ten-year-old audience. With the children's market, the success of the Turtles was guaranteed, and now Surge Licensing can hardly keep up with the applications to produce Turtle-associated objects of the most bizarre kinds.

Such success causes problems. Where the Ghostbusters made an orderly move down the age-range from adult-oriented movie to pre-teen cartoon, the Turtles have leap-frogged the movie-going generation by moving straight from cult comic-book to children's cartoon. This causes some headaches for the movie version, as Jonathan Rutter of publicity agent DDA points out. "We are *very* anxious to separate the cartoon from the film. Obviously we hope that the film can be enjoyed by the very young but we have a different target audience of teenagers and young adults." Perhaps this complicating factor was why the Hollywood majors turned down the offer of a movie, or perhaps they didn't appreciate the appeal of the Turtle's manic combination of elements.

But there's certainly nothing new about zany children's cartoons. England has Count Duckula, the vegetarian vampire, shrewdly calculated to appeal to the US children's market as well. And, of course, the Turtles find an honourable precursor in the saviour of TV-AM, Roland Rat, his own point of origin being the sewers under King's Cross station. And, like the Turtles, Roland Rat is fuelled by jokes and references which are above the head of the target audience.

Shows like Roland Rat have never become the huge money spinners that the Turtles are set to be. Roland is a character, not a narrative format. So the marketing is restricted to hand puppets, joke books and mug logos. The success of Turtles merchandising has less to do with shrewd marketing than what is being marketed. The toys enable children (mostly boys) to re-enact the scenarios of their heroes, and these are scenarios of masculine bonding and fighting. This is where they link most closely with the previous mass crazes of Thundercats and Ghostbusters. Around this central core of enactment can be built a profitable series of collectable toys as well as limitless logo placements.

Why the appeal of the Turtles over the many other aspirants for their position? There is a strong cyclical pattern to the market, and the Ghostbusters had come to the end of their period of pre-eminence. There was a space ready for the Turtles which, unlike many others, have a fascination for adults too: a layer of references and jokes which adults can see but children usually can't.

Another element which came together at the right moment to make TMNT fit the cult requirement is its "realism" — an apparent paradox for such an apparently "bizarre" cult. But TMNT reflects back to its audience a strong and prevalent image of the steetwise gang. This is then integrated into the predictable format of good versus evil, where the motiveless and arbitrary struggle between two forces provides the backdrop for a kind of fantasy vigilanteism that currently seems such a vital part of the fantasy of boys. But the Turtles seem to appeal to girls too in a way that previous examples of the genre have not. This might be because turtles are less excluding than soldiers, or because the martial arts, based on skill rather than brute strength, have always held some fascination for girls.

The explanation for the Turtles' popularity given by the British publicity agency is "their well-developed character differences". But since this seems to consist of different-coloured headbands and preferences for different pizza toppings, I find it implausible.

Some writers have suggested that the Turtles phenomenon deflects fear of non-white culture by rendering the heavily "ethnic" gang into amiable turtles with a commitment to fighting evil. There may be an element of truth in that. The video for the single, *Turtle Power*, certainly makes quite explicit visual references to other evocations of black power in contemporary music.

But there's also a more likely explanation—that of borrowing, muddling up and merging elements from different cultures and genres. With the Turtles, this produces something which satisfies the "postmodernist" impulse while simultaneously creating the zany, unexpected and irreverent elements so beloved by children.

Theatre

In the dark

Neil Bartlett realises his fantasies through theatre and music

Sarrasine started life (as my works usually do) with a stray comment; ten years ago, Nicholas Bloomfield, who has written the score, suggested that Balzac's short story **Sarrasine** (1830) would make a perfect libretto.

The story is about an opera singer (a *castrato*). It features a different kind of music as the soundtrack to each scene of the narrative; it has a fabulous melodramatic climax and is played out in a series of quintessentially operatic locations; the party in a *nouveau-riche* Parisian salon, the opera house, the dressing room, the artist's garret—a bit like Berg's *Lulu*. At the time, I only knew the story through Roland Barthes's classic structuralist analysis of it, *SZ*, and, at the time, though I used to go to sleep listening to Mozart and Dusty Springfield, I thought that opera and musicals (music theatre) were things to be consumed and not made too big, certainly they were too expensive and probably too reactionary.

A rotting portrait glimpsed in an upstairs room, an agonised hand sprouting alien hairs

So why am I making a show out of *Sarrasine* now? Because... if you asked me to draw a picture of a theatre, I wouldn't draw a little black box, but somewhere decorated in red and gold, the kind of place you would take someone to seduce them, the kind of theatre which simply forces you to abandon the small-scale, studio-sized imaginings which are the normal language of fringe theatre. Because I always wanted to go and see shows in which beautiful people were either ravishingly dressed or ravishingly undressed (this was my first impression of performance as a child); because I now think that good theatre, like good sex, is something best done in the dark. Because I think that the most important thing about theatre is that it is old-fashioned, by which I mean it is an archaic, historic language with resonances completely different from those of other modern media. And because Balzac, with his thrilling story, his period costumes, his foreignness, his outrageous characters and his ringing, shocking conclusion, can be my alibi or excuse or justification for once again trying to realise my fantasies, to make theatre for a theatre which does not, in this country, at this time, exist.

More specifically, because Balzac's story is reducible to a cluster of images which reflect the obsessions of my current work; that pro-

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Staring into a mirror, Gloria sees the face of an ageless, sexless monster, not her own reflection

cess of reduction once completed, those images can then be used to recreate the story in a contemporary language. Balzac has a man telling a woman a story about a man who has fallen in love with a man dressed as a woman who is then revealed to be a man. I have a woman impersonating a man telling a story about a man falling in love with a man dressed as a woman who is played by a woman and two men who keep on changing their clothes. In Balzac's story, the central character is made both angelically glamorous and fiendishly disturbing by being made 100 years old, having survived from the corrupt world of the Vatican of 1758 to the even more corrupt Faubourg St Honoré of 1830. In my staging of the story, the character is 260 years old, that is, still alive; his musical memories encompass not only Cavalli and Bellini but also the fatal and fatalistic heroines of the 19th century and the chanteuses of the 19th and 20th centuries—Mistinguette, Frehel, Baker. Balzac's deadly chameleon has extended its range to include not only the archaic stereotypes of actress, whore and diva, but also the contemporary dreams and nightmares of the rent boy, the drag queen and the independent working woman.

The story had to become musical rather than simply theatrical because no matter how adept I may be at justifying imagery as a coherent dramatisation of a gay artist's favourite topics, it operates at a level beyond complete explanation. What is sung is what cannot be said.

Roland Barthes ended his book by admitting that Balzac's text has a power as inexplicable as the power of the beloved over the lover. I usually conclude attempts to "explain" the work by either saying it's about love and death, or by simply gesturing in the direction of one of my dragged-up, footlit, bare-shouldered, knife-wielding performers and murmuring, "But isn't she fabulous?"

I want to present images so strangely powerful that the onus to explain, justify or understand is on the audience; that is what music is so good at doing. A rotting portrait glimpsed in an upstairs room, an agonised hand sprouting alien hairs, a man running across a moor calling out a name can move and provoke us even if we have never read about the originals of Dorian Gray, Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde, Heathcliffe. They touch very definite but very inaccessible, sexual and social fears and hopes. In the same way, in *Sarrasine*, I want people to be fascinated by the image of a woman in a backless Pierre Balmain ballgown, staring into a mirror and being met not by her own reflection, but by the face of an ageless, sexless monster. That monster then sings with the voice of a fallen angel; she/he sings, quite precisely, what cannot be said.

The central character of Balzac's story is a *castrato*. The last thing that we wanted our work to be about was the impersonation or recreation of that fabled musical monster. We are interested in what a *castrato* means, not what a *castrato* actually sounds like. Our first decision in creating the libretto and music was that the role should be played by at least three people. Plans that there should also be a fourth, a silent, gorgeous and under-age man, had to be abandoned for reasons of finance.

Historically, the *castrati* were both adored as stars and reviled as effeminates; so we had to cast a queen or queens. They were objects of sexual fantasy for both men and women—so we had to cast both men and women in the show, and preferably men and women who could be credible objects of desire for heterosexuals and homosexuals of both sexes, preferably simultaneously, depending on what they were wearing at the time.

Why did both men and women adore them? Homosexual men because they were powerful and well-paid homosexuals who made a living out of flaunting it; straight men because straight men love a transvestite; women because they played strong women and because they could be sexually desired (and possessed) without strings.

The lesbians who have seen the show tell me that there should be more cross-dressing rather than just drag for the female performers, but that the mixing of androgyny, nudity, heroines and soprano love scenes is a real turn-on for them too.

The *castrati* were also supreme professionals, making a living out of ruthlessly marketing pathos, sex and glamour. So we wanted to cast performers who knew about those worlds for real. Oh, and they had to be able to sing a score that encompasses vaudeville, Bellini's *Norma*, burlesque, operetta and a very stiff quartet sung in three different languages. For all these reasons, the *castrato* is played, simultaneously, by Bette Bourne, drag diva (her frock technique spiked with classical voice training and a still-vibrant radical politics), François Testory, dancer and singer for Lindsay Kemp, and Beverley Klein, whose credits include *Les Miserables, Carousel* and *Sondheim.*

This trio brings on stage with it a genuine theatrical heritage of glamour and hard work which is completely alien to the well-tempered psychological and visual realism of British theatre; they also, between them, range from bass to high alto in a complex scrambling of male and female vocal stereotypes, from chanteuse growl to tenor heroics to queenly shriek to operatic trill.

Balzac's original text proposes that to listen to a story is to be made complicit in its dirtiest secrets of sex and money. Our staging of that text, by using performers who can claim to speak authentically of those secrets, makes Balzac's Paris look like a city which we still, alarmingly, inhabit.

Sarrasine *is showing at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh until 1 Sept, and then at the Drill Hall Arts Centre, London 25 Sept-20 Oct.*

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Architecture

New age towers

Beverly Russell reports on a new architectural era in eastern Europe

Why is a 39-year-old American architect with a New York office of a mere 20 people building the tallest structure in Europe? The answer is because he's green. William McDonough, whose client, Sasha Muniak, a Polish American developer based in New York, is currently finalising plans for a 50-storey skyscraper, with a 20-storey spire to be constructed mostly of recycled materials, in the heart of Warsaw. "It will be symbolic of the new liberated Poland," says McDonough. "It will represent the phoenix rising, and allow the citizens a visceral reaction to the new era."

With a brief to design the most advanced building in the world, to be called the World Trade Centre, Muniak invited proposals from three architects (in Sweden, Germany and the US) before awarding the US$150 million commission to the American contender.

McDonough's scheme includes the introduction of rubble from the second world war into the concrete panels at the base, and recycled aluminium and glass for the bulk of the skin. Its towering mesh spire, allowing the clouds to pass through, is made from scrap steel. The building's interiors will make use of hardwoods (no endangered rainforest species here) and McDonough's plans incorporate the Deutsche Industriale Norm standards with operable windows and daylight penetrating into all spaces. The interior will also be free of air pollution caused by toxic substances such as glues, formaldehyde and overkill insulation techniques, and the heating will use the latest heat-recovery system.

The designs were described recently by an American architecture critic as looking vaguely like "a multifaceted rocket". There is, however, one useful aspect to its form: it acts as an obelisk sundial, allowing people to calculate the time by the way shadows hit the surface of the tower as the sun moves around it.

At street level, pavilions, galleries and beer halls will, according to McDonough, represent the "microcosm of Poland for visitors coming to the tower and allow this building to be perceived as the nation, not just the centre of Warsaw".

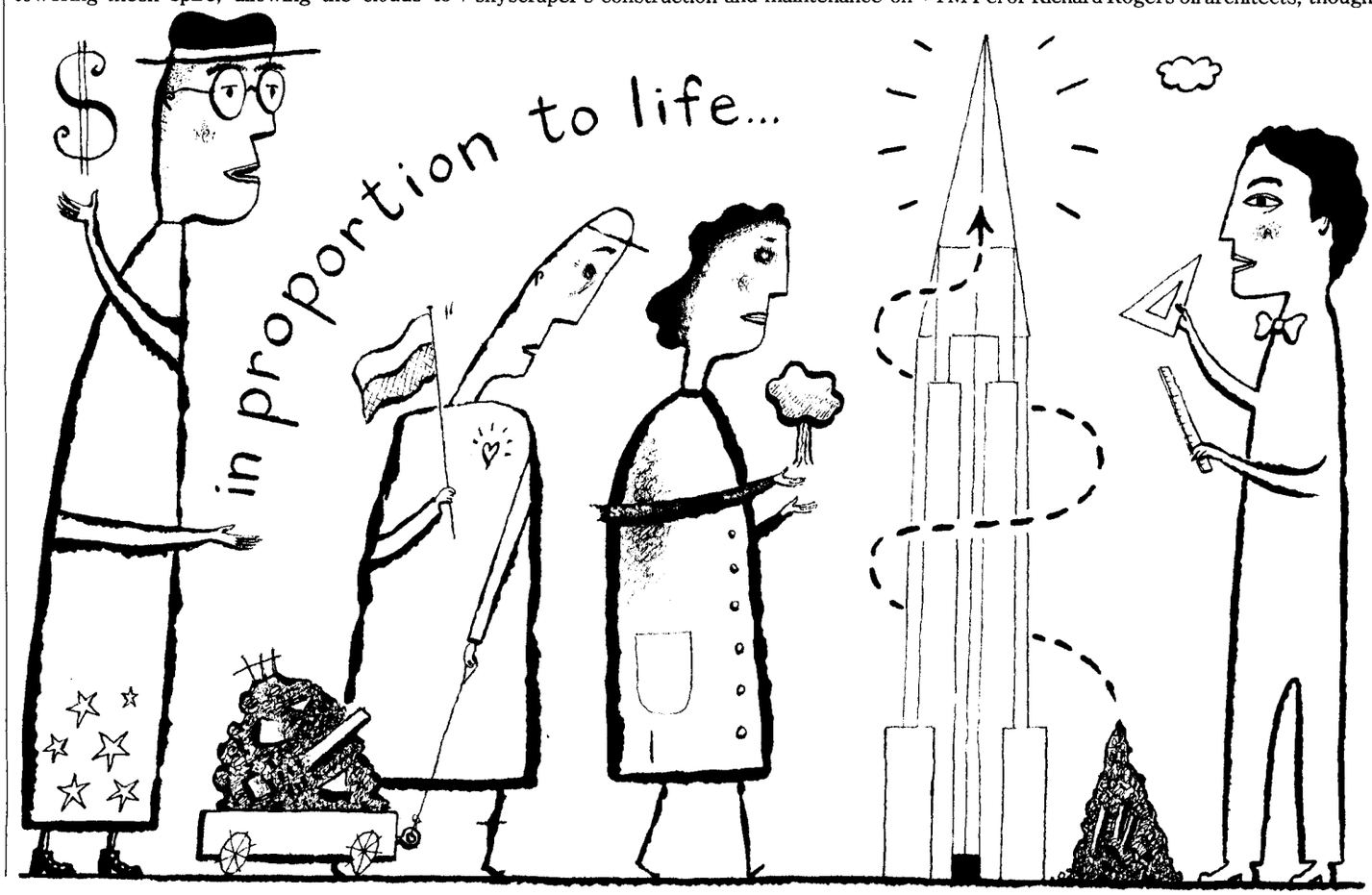
A biological waste system invented by Massachusetts bio-engineer John Todd will recycle sewage on the spot, treating it with living organisms in a filter system and returning it to pure water used in a street-level ornamental fountain. Rubbish generated by the tenants will be methodically recycled. It is envisaged that the ecological impact of this blockbuster on the environment will be offset by a 10 m^2 forest within sight of the building, to be planted, McDonough hopes, by children. This gesture is intended to compensate for the effects of the skyscraper's construction and maintenance on global warming. (The future of this idea is, however, somewhat uncertain since Sasha Muniak is requesting the Polish government to donate the land, which he will agree to keep up as a forest.)

"This building was conceived before the revolution. Since Lech Walesa came to power, the government is redefining some urban issues. At the moment, borough presidents have been appointed with responsibility for the urban development of Warsaw, and it's not clear who is in charge. But we're confident the project will get built." McDonough has organised funding from American banks for construction.

"Green" architecture comes naturally to McDonough, whose first commission was a group of solar houses in Ireland some 15 years ago, and whose interests include fishing and horse riding up to 50 miles a day in the wilds of Iceland whenever he gets the chance. He prefers to describe his work as "poetic" rather than "environmental".

"I am a Platonic geometer. I ask, 'How beautiful is it?,'" says McDonough. "I am not an Aristotelian. I don't ask if it explains the universe."

Building self-sufficient homes, saving energy, siting buildings appropriately and avoiding unhealthy situations indoors is really nothing new. Vitruvius talked about this in 37 BC—the need for fresh air, awareness of microbes and fungal pollution. It's no wonder perhaps that to be identified as a "solar" or "green" architect doesn't sit well with an emerging, more planetary-minded generation. No one would call I M Pei or Richard Rogers oil architects, though



Michael Sheehy

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each designs his buildings around that type of fossil fuel energy.

The fact is that in today's increasingly litigious climate, design must take deep ecological issues into account. In the US, offices must now be guaranteed from potential legal suits from employees wary of hazards from asbestos, glass fibre, toxic radiation from computers and off-gassing from plastic laminate.

This growing awareness is driving the re-evaluation of some ancient wisdom which is basic to the McDonough practice. The concept of a "universal proportion", known as the Golden Ratio, 1.6 to 1, is a piece of mathematical wisdom that was certainly known to Pythagoras 2,500 years ago, and has woven in and out of history ever since. Pythagoras's work explained its connection to musical intervals and harmonic vibrations and thus linked the understanding of harmonious visual and aural proportions. The concept of a "universal proportion" was later explained in a work by Fibonacci in the 13th century. He discovered that if you take any two numbers and add them up in a series, there is an inherent harmony in the series. The ratio between any of the two approaches a constant, known as Phi (after sculptor Phidias the Greek), or the Golden Ratio, 1.62 to 1.

Three hundred years later, a dissertation by Luca Pacioli, illustrated by Leonardo da Vinci, marvelled at the Golden Mean as the inherent, organic proportion informing everything that grows, including the human body. For example, the distance between the crown of the nose to the chin, the bones of the fingers, the head to the navel to the soles of the feet all roughly correspond to a 1.6 to 1 proportion.

History shows that the Golden Proportion was incorporated into such buildings as the Parthenon and Chartres. In the 20th century, architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier found the values of referencing this ancient wisdom to be obvious. Building in harmony with nature can contribute to an architecture that supplies optimum comfort to its users.

Of course, the Golden Ratio is not the only piece of ancient wisdom that is being reinterpreted by McDonough and peers who share his attitude. The Chinese concept of *feng-shui*, a system of geomancy that employs consideration of natural forces, wind and water, in determining site is equally important. (Britain's Norman Foster found that the Chinese never deviated from this method when he built the Hongkong and Shanghai Bank a few years ago.)

In the US, such concepts are moving a new generation of architects away from linear thinking to the more "cyclic" thinking in harmony with a paradigm shift among the avant-garde scientists. The implication is that the answers to the ultimate nature of physical reality are more metaphysical than physical. An architecture that stretches as a helix along the irreversible axis of entropic and living time is more in harmony with the multi-dimensional spirit of the human being, living in several spheres, physical, biological, social, psychological, cultural and spiritual, simultaneously. This is why William McDonough's poetics make sense and hold much hope for the future in eastern Europe.

John Zorn: always cast as the trouble-maker but denies being Mr postmodern phoney

Music

Trumpeting trouble

John Zorn turns pop on its head, as Mark Sinker reveals

If John Zorn, improvising saxophonist and New York composer, seems to be the present avant-garde's only genuine *enfant terrible*, it is a role he's clearly getting tired of. "I get to play in a lot of jazz festivals these days," he told me recently. "Why was I playing at the Montreux Festival? That was a mystery. The answer is, they want a trouble-maker. They want someone to cause a controversy. No matter what festival I go to, it seems like I'm put into that role."

The problem is, no one can see past the idea of him as mix-it-up prankster from the far reaches of postmodern jazz. Neither opponents nor fans seem to know what else to say about what he does. When, for example, he put out an LP, *Spy vs Spy*, of Ornette Coleman (one of the free-jazz pioneers of the sixties) tunes played after the style of such US Thrash bands like Hüsker Dü (whose trademarks were speed, noise and volume), almost everyone, pro *and* anti, smelled a gimmick. "Everybody would love to say that I'm just Mr postmodern phoney, that I put these things together because it's a cute idea... I remember reading things like, 'What's the point of doing thrash versions of Ornette Coleman, except to prove you can do it?'"

"That's *not* why I listened to Ornette's music for 15 years. For me the jazz music of the sixties, Cecil [Taylor], Dolphy, late Coltrane, Ornette and Ayler, the whole energy music scene, is really very similar in intent and attitude to punk in the late seventies and eighties... Ornette really shocked a lot of people. It's hard to hear now, but it was really a break—and I thought if I'm going to do a tribute to Ornette, that's very vital."

There's no point denying Zorn's a master of provocative packaging. A lot of what he does is potentially as inaccessible and absolutely as spiky as any horrible noise, but his playful tie-ups with cartoons, movie soundtracks and junk culture, have built him audiences worldwide (his abrasively inventive Ennio Morricone tribute, *The Big Gundown*, was the catalyst). All the same, there's much more going on than snappy resale. Zorn is important because no other composer-player has his grip on what's happened to theory and to the interplay of content and hype in a world where pop touches everything, as mechanism (production, reproduction, distribution etc), but also as aesthetic.

You can put an LP/CD of African drumming next to Madonna's *Dick Tracy* showtunes, or *The Firebird Suite* conducted by Anton Dorati and assume they are the same kind of thing. They *are* the same kind of thing. The ground rules of every rooted tradition have failed. The real world is now rootless.

As Zorn points out, of course, he's only categorised as a "jazz" musician because he plays the saxophone, and because most "serious" music critics are incapable of useful comment on pop, and daren't consider what he does in this context. In particular they daren't consider that he is being serious in his treatment of material they can only imagine joking around with. One group's "bad" can become another's "good" for deeper reasons than wind-up. The long-established inversions in black street slang ("bad" or "wicked" for "excellent") are a case in point, and instant rejection of any status quo. Similarly, in pop, recast as rebel notes from the underclass, every aspect of technique and delivery gets turned on its head. This is what Zorn recognises and celebrates.

Distinctions between "high" and "low" culture are now blurred enough by class-based marketing (quality music for quality people) as to be utterly meaningless (jazz, of course, has been a victim of highbrow and lowbrow sales campaigns). "Smash racism", reads a little slogan on the sleeve of *Spy vs Spy*: this is Zorn's deep aesthetic, not rad-lib posturing. His music may reduce value to the line "Good? Bad? You decide"—but if that's pop for you, it's also a definition of democracy.

Zorn plays at the Outside In festival in Crawley (1/2 Sept) with his new three-piece Slan. His new LPs Naked City *(Elektra Nonesuch) and* Torture Garden *(Earache Records) will be available by mid-autumn.*

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Sex and Drugs and Rock 'n' roll: Part II

Jenny Diski was born in 1947 in London, where she still lives. Her novels include Nothing Natural, The Rainforest *and* Like Mother. *Her most recent work,* Then Again, *was published by Bloomsbury in May.*

Time, Constance decided, was not cyclical, but more like a spiral. It was not so much that time repeated itself, round and round, and over and over again, but that it *almost* did. Which suggested to her that there probably was a God, or at any rate an omnipotent Critic.

The nature of the spiral is that it very nearly comes full circle, but stops short of the absolute circumference, and creates another near circle that doesn't make it. It was the gap between the end of one almost-circle and the next which convinced her

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that she was inhabiting a more than physical universe. At the place where the circles didn't meet up, where the cycle refused to complete itself, was the commentary: the chiming laughter that could be harsh or indulgent, but, in either case, rang in her ears like the toll of a ghostly clock.

The trouble was that there was more than one cycle and their numbers grew as she got older, so that it seemed to her that, these days, there was hardly a gap between the periods of laughter bouncing off the walls. No time to rest from noticing. Sometimes she thought she would have liked to inhabit a linear planet where what was done was done for good or bad and then it was on to the next thing. But it seemed that by the time life was officially halfway through it was so clogged with near repetition there was hardly any possibility of just getting on with whatever was next. Lately, she had come to suspect that *nothing* was next; only a rolling retrospective. Life wound up, and then it wound down.

In some frames of mind, this notion was not unpleasing to her. It allowed her to sit and watch, and, the truth was, she really didn't like things happening, not things she wasn't expecting. She hoped for a middle and old age without surprises.

Nonetheless, she was sitting at the kitchen table with three cigarette papers, trying to remember how they were supposed to fit together.

"Let me have a go."

This was a reasonable request as Rosie was much better at spatial stuff. One of the benefits of having brought her into the world was that Constance no longer had to wrap Christmas presents. Rosie always did it for her and was much more economical and neat about it.

Constance had never rolled a joint in her life. She had always got someone else to do it because she was incapable of making one that even remotely resembled something that could be smoked. She didn't think it was a necessary skill to have since, in 1968, there had been plenty of talented joint rollers around, and, in the last twenty years, though she kept a little hash about, she never found herself needing a smoke so urgently that if there wasn't anyone around she suffered for the lack of it. The hash in front of her on the table was eighteen months old. She wondered if it had gone off.

But now, in these circumstances, she felt the need for rolling skills because she thought she ought to be in charge of the process. However, working out the ought of these circumstances was precisely her problem, for the only ought that she could be sure of was that these circumstances ought not to have arisen. And yet they had, with an inexorability that confirmed her theory of spiral time. The laughter had already started.

She pushed the papers across the table to her thirteen year old daughter and busied herself with tearing off the underside of the lid of the cigarette packet, rolling it into a compact cylinder to make a tip.

"What a talent we have for organisation," she said, knowing that the only way to forestall the laughter was to nail down the absurdity out loud. "We should go into business together."

Christine Roche

Rosie was too busy concentrating on the cigarette-paper puzzle to answer. Anyway, for her it was a serious business.

"Why can't you use just one paper?" she muttered, although she had just got the hang of it.

A good question. In the days when she was doing this stuff she hadn't thought to wonder.

"It's traditional," Constance said, cutting off another protoplasmic chuckle from on high.

This arm of the spiral began when Rosie came home from school and asked, "What's a spliff?"

Answering people's questions as nearly truthfully as possible had become a habit with Constance. It wasn't a question of morality; more that it was easier and less confusing in the long run. On the same grounds Constance had always answered Rosie's questions truthfully whenever possible. The first signs that this might bring a difficulty all of its own had occurred the previous year while Rosie was leafing through a woman's magazine. She looked up.

"It tells you how to do blow jobs," she said, astonished, her upper lip contracting with distaste.

Constance blinked at her twelve year old. "What do you know about blow jobs?"

Rosie was dismissive. "Everyone knows what blow jobs are." Very sophisticated. "It's *disgusting*." Not so sophisticated. And a question. "*Isn't* it disgusting?"

Constance felt like dirty bath water swirling down a plughole. She could see what was coming, but what was to be done about it? She switched to the evasion principle of child rearing.

"Well," she said with a shrug that did nothing to relieve the sudden tension in her neck. "It's a normal part of sexual activity."

"It's *disgusting*," Rosie insisted. "You wouldn't do that, would you?" Now Constance

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was in the very centre of the whirlpool.

"It's a normal part of sexual activity," she repeated without hope.

Rosie stared at her mother in disbelief. Constance felt trapped for both of them. She was certain that children didn't want to know about their mothers' sex lives. Why had Rosie asked? A wave of anger went through her aimed at Rosie, who she felt should have known better. Telling the truth depended on the good sense of people not to ask the questions they didn't want to know the answer to.

Rosie began to cry and raced upstairs to her bedroom. She wouldn't let Constance kiss her goodnight. The next day she came home from school eating a Mars bar. Constance welcomed her at the door and bent down for a bite. Rosie snapped the Mars bar from Constance's reach.

"Get your own. I know where your mouth's been."

They'd got over it. It hadn't been mentioned again, but Constance had heard hoots of laughter squeezing into the space that was left between Rosie's Mars bar and herself at twelve, trying, but being unable, to imagine her parents, *her parents*, doing it. Very funny.

So when Rosie asked, "What's a spliff?" Constance was prepared for the spinning in her head to start.

"You mean dope?"

"I don't know. You smoke it or make brownies out of it."

"You mean dope," Constance sighed. "Who smokes it or makes brownies out of it?"

Rosie's friends did, or some of them said they did and suggested that the others try. There was talk of acid, too. In a panic Constance tried to remember being thirteen. She smoked in the school boiler house—Black Russian, because style was of the essence—but no dope. There wasn't any around then. She didn't have her first joint until she was fifteen. After that, for a while, there was no stopping her; no substance that she wouldn't put into her body; no risk she wouldn't take. But that, she remembered, as if she were watching archive film, was because she was terminally angry at that time and dedicated to the task of self-destruction.

Rosie wasn't angry. Her interest in dope was the equivalent of Constance's cigarettes in the boiler house—a matter of style. She played Constance's gouged recordings of The Velvet Underground and Jefferson Airplane; she carried her books to school in a sack made of a remnant of mirrored, silver-threaded cloth of eastern origin; she burned incense in her room while she did her homework. But Rosie wasn't raging against the world or looking as far afield as possible for some kind of life that made more sense than the one she'd been allocated. And Rosie didn't want to die.

All the things that Rosie wasn't should have made Constance proud of the job she'd done. That her daughter wasn't a twitching, melancholy, suicidal mess was an indication that Constance had done better than her own mother. But, as Constance pointed out to anyone who said so, to be proud of that was like coming home flushed with the day's success because one hadn't been run down by a lorry. Rosie made Constance uneasy, precisely because she was amiable, positive and lacked the desire to tear her world (and herself) to pieces. Constance waited, moment by moment, as if holding her breath, for the trouble to begin. The "What's a spliff?" question was the starting pistol. Now, it would begin. Constance steadied herself with the thought that she had survived. Probably, Rosie would, too. Probably.

And yet it wasn't the beginning of anything that Constance recognised. Rosie wanted information. She took in Constance's warning about acid and hard drugs and alcohol, nodding impatiently.

"Well, *of course*, I wouldn't use that stuff, I don't want to ruin my life. I was just thinking of having a spliff once a fortnight or so. At weekends," she added.

Constance stared at her daughter, not knowing what to say next to this orderly adolescent. Liberalism and logic came to the rescue in spite of Constance's inner knowledge that there was something very wrong with the conversation.

"Well, in that case, you ought to know how to use the stuff."

'I don't want to ruin my life. I was just thinking of having a spliff once a fortnight or so. At weekends'

It made sense. Rosie was going to try it anyway. She'd better know how much to use and what to do with it.

So the lesson commenced. In the bright light of the kitchen, tobacco was released from a cigarette and spread on the paper; the dark lump of hash was burned enough to make it crumble and Rosie watched carefully as not very much was added to the tobacco. It was not unlike the time that Constance showed her how to separate egg yolk from the white. Rosie's dextrous fingers rolled the paper around the mixture, pushed the tip into one end and twisted the other. There it was.

"But I've never smoked," Rosie suddenly remembered.

Constance spread her arms wide and lifted her shoulders in a fatalistic gesture.

"It won't get me addicted to cigarettes, will it?"

"Not once a fortnight at weekends, I shouldn't think."

Constance lit the twisted end and inhaled a couple of times. Then she handed the joint to Rosie, who took it gingerly, holding the smoking cylinder at arm's length as if it might explode. The look on her face suggested she was about to take some particularly nasty medicine. She craned her neck forward rather than bringing her hand to her mouth as if that would keep the smouldering joint at a safe distance, and took the tiniest puff. Immediately, she started coughing and flung the joint away from her on the table.

"It's horrible!" she yelled and dashed out of the room. A few moments later she came back, having brushed her teeth to get rid of the foul smell of tobacco on her breath. But she was ready to try again, determined to get on with the learning process. Altogether, she brushed her teeth three times before the joint was finished, and inhaled almost nothing. With every inhalation, each more tentative than the last, she choked and pushed the joint towards Constance to get it out of her hands. By the third puff Constance had started laughing at their kitchen comedy; by the fourth Rosie joined in, between bouts of coughing. Constance didn't feel much effect. It looked as if the dope had had its day.

And wickedness seemed to have had its day, too. Comedy had taken over and Constance and Rosie's laughter combined with another peal that didn't come from either of them. This was how it was, then, Constance supposed, looking across at Rosie who, still giggling, had given up trying to smoke the joint and was waving it in the air, making pretty curling patterns with the smoke. Constance could see her own features in her daughter's smiling, rueful, slightly flushed face. She watched Rosie's eyes follow the column of smoke she had made rise and twirl in the air; they were the same eyes that stared back at Constance when she looked in the mirror. Constance followed the smoke with her own eyes until, at the top, it lost formation and wafted away to invisibility. What did the twisting coil remind her of?

She looked back at Rosie and saw the tiny baby she had been. And before *that*, inside her, the foetus that had grown from an undifferentiated cell. And before *that*, her own chromosomes, dividing; a reduction in preparation for reproduction. But, down there in the land of chemical bases, the intertwining double helix had no interest in irony. The similarity and dissimilarity between Constance and Rosie was accidental to DNA's essential task of ensuring its own reproduction. It was a humourless business.

Constance looked around her and saw, not the two of them sitting at either side of the table, but the teeming, whirling, many millions that really inhabited the kitchen. She was stuck for a moment in the turbulence of a chaotic, microcosmic world; as real as real could be. Then she heard the laughter again, coming from she didn't know where, but sounding close in her ear, like a booming whisper, and she was back in the place of process and repetition; held tight in the spiral of time and comedy, and grateful for both.

Constance wiped the residual tears of her own laughter from her eyes. She took the joint from Rosie's fingers, disrupting the pattern of smoke and ground it out in the ashtray.

"Well, there it is," Constance said to her daughter, with a smile. "That's drugs. Now, about sex..."

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Simple Simon economics

STERLING IN DANGER
Alan Walters
Fontana £6.99

Will Hutton

Reading Sir Alan Walters's tendentious and partial account of the events of the last decade and his prognosis for the next makes one sympathise with Nigel Lawson. It must have been insufferable to know both what kind of advice was being given to the Prime Minister and how it was being proffered. More than that, Sir Alan's Simple Simon economic tenets and his happy aptitude for bending facts to his own purposes, while ignoring others, must have been doubly infuriating.

Sir Alan, of course, knew that monetary policy was too tight in 1980/81; too lax in 1987/88; and he always knows how to interpret the monetary message of the often conflicting movements of sterling on the foreign exchange markets. Keep it simple is his motto. Make sure that the quantity of notes and coins in circulation is growing ever more slowly; let the exchange rate go where it will so that the supply and demand for sterling is harmlessly squared—and if it's hard to read the runes about the direction of policy, rely on me.

On the other hand, devaluationists of all political persuasions might find Sir Alan's bracing views to their liking. As an old-time devotee of the notion that the price mechanism works, Sir Alan is unapologetically of the opinion that if sterling falls it will lead to more British exports as they grow cheaper. This is not a favoured view at present, as even the Confederation of British Industry and Institute of Directors outdo each other in their advocacy of a high pound in the strange mutual death-wish so characteristic of the British business establishment.

If they imagine they might be currying favour with the inmate of No. 10, this book should disabuse them. Mrs Thatcher vetoed ERM entry in 1985, it seems; and the £/DM rate collapsed from 3.75 to 2.80 just as the good professor had expected. There was an export boom and the Tories won the election; but then the CBI and the IOD have never been very good at promoting either their members' interests or those of the Conservative Party—another curious British irony.

And Sir Alan, like his family friend, does not like foreigners or any interference with the sovereign power of nations—especially if they are German. The great advantage of floating exchange rates is that they freed Britain from the tyranny of US monetary policy under Bretton Woods; and if we dare enter the ERM we will simply substitute rule from Frankfurt and Berlin for that of Washington.

So the most spirited chapter of the book is on monetary systems for Europe. Sir Alan does not like the ERM for the same reasons as Nicholas Ridley: it is a German racket to run monetary Europe. The Bundesbank rules, he alleges; for if the ERM is to achieve its target of price stability, then it needs the cloak of the independent and credible Bundesbank. The ERM must "be dominated by the élite and unelected Bundesbank, and democracy be damned!"

Nor is he impressed by the results. Using figures that stop in 1985, he asserts that member countries' inflation rate fell even more slowly than of the rest of the OECD; and as for variability of inflation, he says that "comparing the seven years before with the seven years after 1979, among ERM countries the dispersion of inflation rates actually increased, whereas in the other OECD countries it actually fell."

After 1985 the comparison would promote another conclusion, but Sir Alan does not allow facts to intrude into his analysis. And indeed he makes a nice point that advocates of ERM membership might ponder. Consider two countries like Italy and Germany with a long history of different inflation rates; and suppose that with free movement of funds their interest rates under ERM will converge to an average. After all, why should Germans forgo 10 per cent interest rates in Italy if the exchange rate with the DM is going to remain stable? They buy lira assets and sell the DM, lowering and raising the respective interest rates. But is the convergence of their interest rates to a norm (say 5 per cent) economically rational? If inflation in Germany is, say, 3 per cent, Germans will be paying real interest rates of some 2 per cent, while in Italy, with an inflation rate of some 7 per cent, the real rate will be negative. A lax monetary policy therefore in inflation-prone Italy; a tight policy in low-inflation Germany. The result is absurd—but it is the inevitable tendency of the system.

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Sir Alan thinks it a fatal flaw, and exactly what happened when Nigel Lawson shadowed the DM. There seemed to be no exchange-rate risk; UK interest rates went down to the German level and inflation-prone Britain boomed—and we live with the results today.

Sir Alan's counter-proposal is a commodity-backed European currency called the ECOM to replace the ERM and ECUs of whatever hue—either John Major's or Jacques Delors's. If it were not proposed by a man who once had the ear of the Prime Minister it would be dismissed as hare-brained; in fact it is hare-brained and has as much chance of being seriously considered as Sir Alan Walters has of regaining serious academic recognition.

He is instead an economic polemicist and ideologue of some talent; and, if Britain were seriously governed, the chances of his enjoying such influence at what amounts to the Court of good Queen Maggie would be minimal. But the lady is, in effect, our elected monarch; and has the discretion to listen to whomever she will and do whatever she must. On this reading be cautious about Britain's eventual membership of the ERM under her leadership: she has vetoed it twice before to win two elections—why lose a third? And as for the EMU; forget it!

To the Yaroslav station

MEMOIRS
Andrei Sakharov (translated by Richard Lourie)
Hutchinson £19.99

Catherine Porter

As the cultural renaissance in the Soviet Union gathered momentum and the political prisoners returned home, Andrei Sakharov took his place as the moral and intellectual leader of the liberal opposition.

In this first instalment of his *Memoirs*, written between 1978 and 1990, Sakharov describes growing up as a child of the enlightened professional intelligentsia amid the optimism and cruelty of the 1930s; his schoolboy experiments with electricity and binoculars; his physics studies at Moscow University; his work during the war as an inventor at a munitions factory; and his graduate work just before the end of the war at the Physics Institute of the Academy of Sciences, where he studied particle and plasma physics, and the possibilities of thermo-nuclear reaction. As one colleague said: "Andrei proposed at least two methods of isotope separation a week."

In 1950, he and his family moved to a secret city ("the Installation"), where he embarked on research into controlled fusion. Here is the first account of the drama and grandeur of the Soviet nuclear weapons programme. As Sakharov explored the energy source of life on earth and the potential for its destruction, he read Goethe. It was "superb physics", "a theoretician's paradise". He was a "soldier in a new, scientific war", determined that the sacrifices of the last one should not be in vain.

The year 1953 saw Stalin's death and the first Soviet nuclear test. Sakharov, now a member of the Academy of Sciences, was shocked when thousands of people had to be evacuated from their homes on the Kazakhstan steppes; he had been too busy preparing the device to consider the problem of radiation fallout.

At the end of that year, he was made a Hero of Socialist Labour and awarded the Stalin prize. But he was already beset by fears of the catastrophic results to which this newly released force might lead, and his subsequent research into the biological and environmental dangers of radiation led him to denounce atmospheric nuclear testing as a crime against humanity. The publication of this research brought him under fierce attack from Khrushchev, but his lobbying finally achieved success in 1963 with the conclusion of the international Limited Test Ban Treaty.

In the years that followed, Sakharov continued to use his authority at the Physics Institute to write letters attacking the pseudo-genetics of Lysenkoism, the rehabilitation of Stalin and the pollution of Lake Baikal. In 1968, frustrated in his attempts to influence the Soviet establishment from within, he presented his ideas on war, peaceful co-existence and civil rights to the west. *Reflections* sold over 18 million copies around the world, outselling Georges Simenon and Agatha Christie. Though hazy on actual social organisation, his essay presented the world with a passionately argued moral alternative to communism, and in the Soviet Union it provided a focus for the various disparate intellectuals beginning to coalesce into the dissident movement.

Together with his second wife, Elena Bonner, Sakharov helped to establish the Soviet Human Rights Committee, attending samizdat trials, defending various ethnic groups, campaigning against capital punishment and the misuse of psychiatry, and speaking up for religious freedom and Jews wishing to emigrate.

As the "father of the hydrogen bomb" assumed his international role as elder statesman of the Soviet intellectual opposition, his appeals to the west and to Chile's General Pinochet were raising the temperature at home, where he was denounced in the press as an enemy of peace and *détente*, and Elena Bonner was subjected to a volley of slander and anti-Semitic abuse.

In 1975 Sakharov was awarded the Nobel peace prize, and four years later western newspapers published his criticisms of military intervention in Afghanistan. This was the final straw for the Soviet authorities. In early 1980 he was stripped of all his government awards and banished to the closed city of Gorky, where he lived under surveillance for the next six years. Here, thanks largely to Elena Bonner's love and energy on his behalf, he became the dissident movement's leader and symbol, whose every word was picked up in the west.

In December 1986, Gorbachev invited him to return to Moscow, to transform the disunited intelligentsia opposition into a loyal and coherent movement. Sakharov's *Memoirs* end as he and Elena Bonner step off the train at Yaroslav station on to a platform teeming with journalists from all over the world. A second instalment will cover his life in Moscow, as member of the presidium of the Academy of Sciences, honorary chairman of the Stalinist "Memorial" and delegate to the Congress of People's Deputies, where he argued that its powers be broadened to ensure full parliamentary democracy.

Since his death last December, the new Union of Democratic Forces has pledged itself to continue his struggle. But his loss has been a major blow both to the crisis-ridden liberal opposition and to the Soviet leadership. Though the dissident movement never enjoyed any real mass support, these beautifully written and translated memoirs are a testimony to his personal courage and his powerful humanitarian appeal for individual honesty, fundamental rights and social justice.

Assaults on the rational

THE GATE OF ANGELS
Penelope Fitzgerald
Collins £12.95

Carol Rumens

Is thought blood? If invisible atoms might exist, why not the human soul? These are some of the imponderables trying the best young minds at Cambridge in 1912; falling in love is another. Fred Fairly meets Daisy Saunders after an accident in which both are tumbled from their bicycles while trying to avoid a recklessly driven cart. Rationalist Fred, son of a rector but now Junior Fellow in Practical Physics at the College of St Anglicus ("Angels") knows, after a mere, semi-concussed half-hour with Daisy, that he must marry her, even though it will mean the sacrifice of his fellowship. ("As on Mount Athos, no female animals capable of reproduction were allowed on the college premises, though the starlings couldn't altogether be regulated.")

Daisy, a tough, good-natured trainee nurse from south London, is, by the standards of the day, a Fallen Angel, embroiled, for want of an alternative, with the seedy editor of a local paper, who has pressed financial help on her as well as his ardour: "It's nothing, you just want to take a couple of whiskeys." As in all the best romances (this is what, with a spoonful of satire, *The Gate of Angels* partly is), the author leads her characters, both separately and together, through a witty dance of collisions—social, intellectual, moral—before reprieving them by a signalled, if not certain, happy ending.

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As if love were not enough, a fresh assault on the rational is provided when Dr Matthews, a medievalist and amateur ghost-story writer, takes over the narrative for the account of a hideous murder carried out by three nuns at the spot near to where Daisy and Fred took their tumble. Who *was* driving that unlit cart, and how did the south-west gate of Angels unlock itself? Fitzgerald floats the metaphysical issue with proper delicacy, leaving crass certainty to the materialists such as Professor Flowerdew, a disciple of Ernst Mach, the physicist who opposed atomic research because it was based on the *unobservable*.

Fitzgerald's sense of period is flawless. Perhaps her focus has a slightly mellow, filtered quality, but this seems justified by the fact that the period setting is something of a device. A culture that sustains, on the one hand, the building of new science labs and, on the other, a hospital pharmacy full of leeches and opium, seems markedly like our contemporary admixture of magic-crystal superstition and microchip sophistication. *The Gate of Angels* is, surely, an allegory about the present.

If its ingredients suggest an Iris Murdoch novel, its method does not. The characters are given little scope for seeming to suggest their own manoeuvres. (The only unintentional moments appear to be typographical, causing a character sometimes to be called Skippey and sometimes Shippey.) Pace and tight plotting, however, compensate for the lack of spaciousness. Like the cow-heel broth on which Daisy was reared, *The Gate of Angels* is both economical and meaty.

After new gods

THE PLAY OF THE EYES
Elias Canetti
André Deutsch £14.95

Carole Angier

Elias Canetti is passionately intellectual, and his is a passionately intellectual autobiography. In this third volume we follow the next stage of his intellectual growth—and like the first two it is more exciting, and more dangerous, than most people's *amours*.

At 25 he had written his terrifying novel, *Auto da Fé*, in which he had outdone the master of his youth, Karl Kraus, in the scourging and satirising of his fellow Viennese. That was covered in volume two, *The Torch in My Ear*. At the end of that volume he had met Isaac Babel, from whom he learned "how wretched judging and condemning are as ends in themselves". He was ready for his next step, his next lesson.

His first new god was Hermann Broch, ex-patron of writers, now a writer himself. Broch was the opposite of Kraus, the opposite of Canetti: gentle, modest, uncombative; listening to and assimilating everything. Canetti's account of this is, as always, extraordinary. "Rhythmically," he says, "this assimilation was not a devouring but a breathing." Broch's main sense was his breath, which made him extremely vulnerable. He could not refuse or leave anyone "breathing face to face with him". "To get away he had to have someone waiting for him somewhere else"; and so he rushed around the city, saved from each person by the next.

Broch's influence was mostly by example, but it prepared Canetti for his next and greatest god, the real replacement for Kraus: the mysterious, ascetic Dr Sonne. Here is the greatest mind Canetti has ever met, unbelievably learned and lucid, "the library he did not own"; yet he has renounced all ambition, all power, he never judges and never hates. He is so luminously intelligent he is clairvoyant; yet he is utterly impersonal. He is concerned only with ideas.

Once again Canetti's account is uniquely impressive and striking. For months before he meets him he is fascinated by Sonne because he has the same face as Kraus; it is this similarity of their faces that allows Canetti to tear himself away from Kraus to Sonne, from accusation and hate to the richness and respect of understanding.

This is the main story of *The Play of the Eyes*. It is clearly only half true: Canetti's wife Veza sees no resemblance between Kraus and Sonne, for instance; and the rest of the book shows that Canetti remained violently arrogant and attacking for years, probably forever. But when he writes, I feel Ford's "profound contempt for facts". The writing itself is what matters; and the more mythical it is, the better it is—more beautiful, and truer to Canetti's mind, which is the real world of his autobiography.

I was bowled over (and I use these words with their full force, as Canetti would require) by this volume, as by the others. By Canetti's portraits of the people he loved and admired—Anna Mahler, with her beautiful eyes and her need for freedom, touchy, combative Musil, and Fritz Wotruba, who sculpted so as not to kill; and by his portraits of those he despised—Alma Mahler, vapid, fat and self-satisfied, and Franz Werfel, who so overflowed with sentiment that "one expected to find little puddles on the floor around him and was almost disappointed to find it dry".

Canetti himself is like the ones he admires—as touchy as Musil, as vehement as Merkel, as competitive as Scherchen, as violent as Wotruba. But most of all, he is like his mother, whose secret he learns here. It is from her that he gets his ambition, his suspicion and his pride. In his need both to dominate and venerate, to impress and to learn, he re-enacted over and over those months in his childhood when he learned a whole new language in order to win her. It is appropriate, and painful, that this volume should end with her death. Canetti, who is 85, is working on another. If only one more book could be written in the history of the world I would choose his. But without his mother to please and defy I wonder if his tongue will lose some of its freedom.

Re-entry problems

A DICTIONARY OF BORGES
Evelyn Fishburn and Psiche Hughes
Duckworth £19.95

Sean French

The obvious thing to say about this book is that it is itself a Borgesian project. Mario Vargas Llosa says it in his foreword: "This is a book that would have been to Borges's taste. Although he used to pride himself on never having read anything that was written about his life or his work, I am sure he would have read it from beginning to end."

A strange thing to say about a dictionary, and surely untrue. Borges would have been fascinated by the *idea* of a reference guide to his work—an atlas of the imaginary worlds of his various creations—but not the pedantic actuality of the book. Why compile the book itself when you could express all that was necessary in a fake book review of a non-existent Borges reference book just a few hundred words long—like this one, perhaps?

Of course this book is fascinating. I had imagined that much of the learning displayed with such economy in Borges's short stories was fake, the tip of an iceberg with nothing underneath. Some of it is bogus, but like a master con man, he mixes enough of the genuine to make the confusion almost insoluble. Until now, that is. If nothing else, this dictionary shows that Borges's fantasies were supported on their creator's immense bedrock of learning.

For example, on just the first page of the great story, "The Approach to Al-Mu'tasim", in my edition of *Ficciones*, there are no fewer than 18 proper names. Of these, ten are real, one genuinely fictional (John H Watson, narrator of the Sherlock Holmes stories), and are included in the dictionary. The rest are made up by Borges. Five of the names are of extremely obscure Indian journals, four of which are genuine, the fifth probably a mischievous invention, though the joke can only have been for the author's amusement.

The proclaimed policy of the dictionary has been to explain only references to genuine works, but this—and here the book is at its most dizzyingly Borgesian—has proved impossible to sustain. Other people's fictional characters are judged to be genuine in a way that Borges's own inventions are not.

More complex still are the references whose reality seems impossible to establish. The story "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" concerns the bizarre *Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*, "a literal if inadequate reprint of the 1902 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*". One volume of one fugitive impression of this pirated edition contains an entry about an unknown country (in the area of Iraq, curiously enough). This entry is Borges's invention, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* obviously isn't, but where does the fiction begin?

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Borges claimed (to the dictionary's authors) that he possessed a copy of the mysterious *Cyclopaedia*.

In entries such as this, Borges retains his mystery, but the book as a whole has a strangely reductive effect. It will, as reviewers are meant to say about work of this kind, be useful for students, but often at the expense of the text's richness and ambiguity.

George Steiner, one of Borges's greatest admirers, has often written of the shared values and allusion that marked an earlier stage of western culture. Borges is at the same time one of this culture's last great practitioners and its most devastating parodist. Like Joyce and Eliot (whom Borges revered and who are entries in this book along with Adolf Hitler, Liverpool and the *Tatler*), Borges—with his fraud and his pedantic scholarship—is an ironic observer of cultural disintegration.

To read a three-page Borges sketch, weighed down and slowed down by this dictionary, is to lose the effect of gentlemanly shared reference and scholarly scrupulousness that Borges guyed with such a straight face.

Best and worst of times

SCOTTISH VOICES 1745-1960
T C Smout and Sydney Wood
Collins £16.95

Roy Porter

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times: thus the last two centuries of Scottish life, as seen through the eyes of dozens of natives and travellers whose first-person testimonies are expertly quilted into this moving social history.

Sections on home life, leisure, and work bring out the happy days and the noble northern character traits: the neighbourliness of the bothie and the steamie, a love of wild conviviality (Hugh MacDiarmid on the ecstasy of getting drunk in the 1950s in an old-fashioned "frowsy and fusty" Glasgow pub, one devoted exclusively to *drinking*); the comradeship of the pit and the herring smack; faith in education and the lad o'parts (Hugh Miller from Cromarty around 1810 joyous on being recommended for Latin by his schoolmaster); and, most of all, a fierce pride in work well done, in neat housekeeping, in self-reliance. James Milne remembered years of boulder-breaking on his father's Buchan farm in the 1840s: the sheer gutsiness of all that grind left me lost in admiration.

But these are the virtues of adversity. Dominating the view—and the excellent photographs, too—are penury and backbreaking toil that time never seemed to allay. Barefoot boys starving in Gorbals tenements long after such scenes disappeared from Poplar; Fife labourers still harvesting with scythes in the 1950s.

On an Aberdeen beach (early 1900s)

The unremitting dourness of life sanctioned an endemic violence: schoolchildren tawsed till they bled, apprentices beaten by bosses, wives battered by husbands. Institutions displayed a meanness meant to humiliate. An Aberdeen woman recalls her husband in hospital in the 1930s: matron prescribed eggs and cocoa, but the hospital refused to supply them. The wife was expected to fetch them in herself: "I hadn't a penny." The English loathed the workhouse, and rightly; the Scots didn't even have such a safety-net against starving.

Scots virtues and vices go heads-and-tails. In 1844 the Kirk Session reported on 75-year-old Margaret Lundie: "'She is a pauper belonging to Coupar Angus. Has 5s a month. She gathers dung. Mrs Murray of Simprim gives her £1 in the year.' Says 'she is as happy as they that have mair gear'." When complaints got you nowhere, you learned not to complain. There was a kind of collusion between tightwad employers and sanctimonious magistrates, dreading generosity as though it were the devil's work, and, on the other side, a browbeaten population, girding itself against rebuff with a sturdy independence that shored up the system.

Two big issues are missing from this anthology. First: the enigma of Scots political culture. How was it that Scotland long sustained such a deplorable tradition of political supineness (fed by sentimental chauvinism), yet also bred Red Clydeside? Secondly: the migrations. The book is called *Scottish Voices*, but we hear only some of them, those who stayed home: maybe not a representative sample. For wasn't it the most get-up-and-go Scots who did just that, flocking in their millions south of the Tweed, across the Atlantic and to the Antipodes? I missed the musings of enterprising emigrants comparing the new world and the old country; and what did those back home think of it all?

Congratulations, however, to the editors for keeping all the old warhorses out. No Boswell, Sir Walter Scott or Sir Harry Lauder, none of your *Scots Whae Hae*, no narcissistic nationalists whining on about the spirit of true Caledonianism. Instead, honest, direct autobiography from lots of ordinary people, offering snapshots of a society where work was tough, deprivation inescapable, opportunities few, and, for many, the only avenue of advancement was out.

What has changed?

Under the canopy

THE BURNING SEASON: THE MURDER OF CHICO MENDES AND THE FIGHT FOR THE AMAZON RAIN FOREST
Andrew Revkin
Collins £9.99 paperback/£16 hardback

Joy Melville

"I don't want flowers at my funeral because I know they would be taken from the forest," said Chico Mendes, the Amazonian rubber tapper who was murdered by Brazilian cattle ranchers in 1988.

Mendes's passion for the rainforest started as a child, when the forest was his only school. Only five of his 17 brothers and sisters survived, and, sleeping in a hammock in the tiny family house built on stilts, his childhood was spent in collecting firewood, pounding rice and hauling cooking pots full of water from the nearest river. At nine, he followed his father into the forest to learn how to tap rubber; by 11 he was harvesting rubber full-time.

Revkin's sympathetic portrait of Mendes chronicles his gradual politicisation. He was to find that the politics of the Amazonian forest were those of corruption and self-interest. Revkin charts the strange, sad saga of the forest from its naming by a 1541 expeditionary force after the fierce Amazonian-type women warriors it encountered, through its Mecca-status for mid-19th-century naturalists, to the growth of the rubber trade. The tappers were brutally exploited and thousands died annually.

Mendes's own experiences and his friendship

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with a fugitive communist moulded him. Other activists fuelled his desire to bring schools and economic independence to the forest people, who were shackled by illiteracy and debt.

In 1964, when the new military government decided to "flood the Amazon forest with civilisation", it failed to notice the forest was already occupied. Thousands of Indians, tappers, nut-gatherers and other groups who lived and worked there were outraged when the developers moved in, burning and slashing the forest to make way for hydroelectric dams and railways.

In the area where he lived, Mendes became a grassroots organiser of the tappers' fight to save their livelihood, homes and the rainforest around them from its incineration by the developers and the cattle barons, who wanted it for pasture. The government aimed to shift the Indians to planned colonies; and tension and murder accelerated as the forest inhabitants were ruthlessly terrorised and killed.

In 1985 Mendes became the national spokesman for the tappers and forged an alliance between them and the Indians. He took his case abroad, attracting headlines about his environmental work. But public awareness that in only a few centuries the 15 million square miles of rainforest had been cut to 6.2 million square miles, did not extend to the dangers still facing those living in the rainforest.

Alongside his unravelling of the complex politics of the Amazonian forest, Revkin writes absorbingly of its strong spell. From above, the forest may seem a uniformly mottled green carpet, but under its canopy are 15 species of beetle under one log; foot-long canoe-shaped leaves; electric blue Morpho butterflies, seven inches across; caterpillars the size of cigars; cotton-candy-pink river porpoises. Eight feet of rain fall annually and the forest has its own eco-system, in which fish swim for part of the year through the treetops, distributing seeds.

After Mendes's murder, deep in the rainforest, tappers filed past his coffin, one by one, speaking of the way his courageous defence had changed their lives. His death was international news, ironically bringing nearer his goal that the forest be saved for those living there.

I have never been to the Amazonian forest, but I have just returned from the rainforests of Venezuela and Guyana and am overwhelmed by Mendes's passion for them. Revkin's book is a trenchant plea for their preservation.

Bodyguard of lies

BRITISH INTELLIGENCE IN THE SECOND WORLD WAR: VOL 5
Michael Howard
HMSO £12.95

Nicholas Richardson

The root of strategic deception lies in influencing the enemy's moves while concealing one's own. From the start of the war London had two extraordinary assets in this field. The first was MI5's almost total control of the German agents in this country. The second was Ultra, the breaking of German secret codes.

But double-agents need time and a well-calculated dose of accurate information to communicate if they are to be credible; while advance knowledge of enemy moves through signals intelligence does not of itself ensure success. In any event, until 1942, London was in no position to practise more than passive deception, since Britain was too weak to mount an attack in the west. But in Africa, Wavell was determined on an immediate offensive once Italy came into the war, and set up a deception unit (Force "A") off his own bat. This initiative prompted London to supplement the Twenty Committee, which basically dealt with double-agents, by a London Controlling Section to plan long-term deception.

Its first major coup was Operation Mincemeat, in April 1943, the celebrated story of *The Man Who Never Was*, which persuaded the enemy that the Allied objective was not Sicily but the Aegean. But a year earlier Force "A" had mounted an operation which had more important long-term implications. This was Cascade, the planting on the Germans of a vastly inflated British Order of Battle in the Middle East. Not only did the Germans believe it then, they believed it until the end of the war. As Sir Michael Howard drily observes—from personal experience, perhaps?—"Once an idea is established in the minds of military staffs, it is remarkably difficult to root it out."

The vastly more elaborate preparations for Overlord built on these precedents. The irony here was that, having spent the previous two years trying to persuade the Germans that a cross-Channel invasion was imminent, the Allies were now in fact planning one.

The planners aimed to persuade the Germans, first, that the assault would take place on north-east France and not Normandy, and then to present the invasion when it had happened as no more than a feint. To this end they constructed an entirely bogus outfit. Fusag, the First United States Army Group, was purportedly stationed in south-east England, poised for the main assault on the Pas-de-Calais. By a nice touch its alleged commander was that notorious fighting general, George Patton.

Operation Fortitude was a remarkable success. Much of the credit must go to the double-agents involved, and in particular "Garbo", a young Spaniard who arrived in Britain in 1942 and two years later was "able to treat his German case-officers as a temperamental mistress might treat an elderly and besotted lover".

It is a revealing phrase. Howard's history is both assured and elegant, but it really takes wings when he deals with his exotic cast of agents. (Just as some of the finest passages in his masterly history of the Franco-Prussian war describe the doomed thunder of the great cavalry death-rides: this mandarin is a romantic at heart.) There was Garbo, who was even awarded an Iron Cross (but there were difficulties with protocol in Berlin): "Tricycle", whose lifestyle so shocked the Americans; "Gleam", the Wren in Delhi whose credibility appears to have rested, in the Abwehr's eyes, on her having been a member of "the Welsh Nationalist Aryan World Movement".

As everyone knows, this is the official history whose publication has been delayed for a decade. For the layman it is difficult to see just why. Unless of course this was a measure of strategic deception, too.

Schooled in trivia

DEFINITIONS OF A HORSE
Jaci Stephen
Hutchinson £12.99

Jeremy Lewis

Tidy-minded librarians should make sure they don't wrongly categorise Jaci Stephen's first novel on the strength of its title: though it carries as a prefix Mr Gradgrind's invective against "Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!" and apposite remarks about the nature, breeding and rearing of horses are scattered throughout the text, *Definitions of a Horse* is, in fact, set in a comprehensive school in 1984.

According to the jargon-infested booklet issued to interested parents, Riverside School exists to bring out the potential in every pupil, so that "he (or she) might achieve self-fulfilment: both in the context of his (or her) awareness of society and the world at large; at all times recognising the value of hard work, self-discipline, respect and altruistic concern for others at all times and in all circumstances, regardless of colour, creed or limb deficiency". But as the lecherous, beer-swilling geography master sourly observes, no pupils of his shows any interest in learning or any desire to go on to university, yet every one of them will soon be earning far more than he does; while a particularly rude and obstreperous boy "wasn't an aggressive little sod any more, but a 'deviant'."

Not surprisingly, perhaps, Riverside's head is an increasingly detached and disenchanted figure. Much given to early morning masturbation—his wife prefers jigsaws to sex—he no longer finds teaching a stimulating business, but has come to feel like a tired old actor going through his lines before a cynical audience, most of whom he does not even recognise. Like many of us who have trodden the same treadmill for too long and are too old to try another, "he responded with irritation and hatred towards his inability to break both the pattern of himself and his situation. There was only one way to keep the feelings under control: by

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feeding himself with more and more programmes, rules and regulations..."

Very different is his deputy, who quotes A N Whitehead with genuine relish ("Routine is the god of every social system"), likes nothing better than to catch boys not wearing regulation socks, and barters relevant details with a female colleague equally keen on tracking down blazerless girls. About them moves an overlarge cast of unappealing pupils, a school cook who runs a counselling service for "kitchen-related problems", and petty-minded fellow-teachers feuding over newspapers in the senior common room or the photocopying machine.

Stoutly defended from intruders by his secretary ("He *is* the headmaster, after all. Why *should* he be pestered with school business?"), the ever-more demented head locks himself away in his study, from which there emanate mysterious sounds of hammer and saw: in the end, most pleasingly, he succeeds in bringing the entire school, so dependent on routine, grinding to a halt. Though the more realistic earlier chapters work better than the wilder, more surrealistic happenings later on, Jaci Stephen has a nimble turn of phrase ("the hurried nibble of typewriter keys") and a keen eye for how people talk in schools; and one passage, in which a demonic girl pupil who is also a keen magician persuades her terrified English master to push knives into a blackened coffin containing one of his female colleagues, provides a moment of true terror.

Eye for change

BRITISH SOCIETY SINCE 1945
Arthur Marwick
Penguin £5.99

Pat Thane

A possible indicator that we are experiencing some cultural decline is the recent death of Pelican books. They represented an important theme in the cultural history of 20th-century Britain: the existence in all classes of a significant audience for books and other cultural artefacts that were openly and unashamedly serious and educational, providing knowledge and advancing understanding in ways that were neither always obviously useful nor obviously fashionable.

Such earnestness is out of favour. Pelican is subsumed in Penguin, and the Pelican Social History of Britain is reborn as the Penguin Social History. Marwick has updated his volume (first published 1982) to include the eighties: and someone has anticipated his argument by changing the cover pic from Peter Sellers as the stroppy shop steward in *I'm All Right Jack* to Lawrence Harvey in *Room at the Top*. Presumably it was not the author, who takes a balanced view of unions and doesn't think that Thatcher has won us all over to thrusting individualism.

His theme throughout is that the continuities since the war are as striking as the changes. Written by one of the Open University's stoutest advocates, the book lies as admirably as the OU itself in the tradition of high-level, demanding but unpatronising, adult education. In the substantial new section, as in the reprinted old one, Marwick provides an exceptionally clear, yet complex and nuanced, narrative and analysis, integrating social, cultural, economic and political change.

No one should underestimate how hard this is to do well. Essential concept such as class, and the principles of economic and social policy are clearly explained. Throwaway insights tell us more than acres of solemn treatise: on, for example, "the hit-and-miss quality of postwar social engineering"; or on Wilson's famous phrase: "White heat was not quite the right image; much of the new technology was concerned with suds, shine and phoney flavours."

Above all, Marwick is relentlessly sceptical of tidy explanations, joyously hostile to the pieties of fashion, as in his demonstration of how little relationship clichés about "post-industrialism" or "post-Fordism" bear to historical reality. As for the more apocalyptic mode of interpretation, he takes Robert Hewison's pessimistic vision of the collapse of British culture into "heritage" to task in a stimulating defence of the actual vitality of British theatre, painting, literature and architecture, not least in his native Scotland in the past decade. He subjects the conventional superficial generalisations to empirical scrutiny without crassly rejecting theory or falling into random empiricism.

Rather he recognises that social change moves in several directions at once, that differing accounts of experience are complementary rather than right or wrong, and that it is possible to integrate such complexities into multi-dimensional accounts.

This new edition of the old Pelican is well worth buying.

Confusion in the clinic

MATILDA'S MISTAKE
Ann Oakley
Virago £12.99

Lucasta Miller

A few years from now, Matilda Cressey, ambitious, good-looking, thirty-something and single, leaves a successful career in journalism to become president of the Council for Consumer Affairs. Meanwhile, her friends, the Cornfords, have taken advantage of a private health boom, set in motion by Thatcherism, which has hijacked all things green and herbal and is epitomised in Dr Stephen van den Biot's high-class natural-birth clinic. Or have they been taken for a ride? Willow Cornford's initial enthusiasm for Roman Hall subsides after her traumatic experiences in childbirth. And Matilda goes to investigate under the banner of the consumer watchdog.

What Matilda hasn't bargained for is the charisma of van den Biot. At first suspicious, she and her semi-detached boyfriend William take a midnight trip to Roman Hall where they catch sight of van den Biot and his cronies involved in what seems like the ritualistic burial of a baby. When Matilda turns up to confront van den Biot, he explains that the interment of the placenta is part of the post-natal process—and, presumably, one of those expensive extras on offer at his clinic. Matilda is intrigued, and, ditching William, whose taste for frozen reconstituted chicken Kiev has always inspired her scorn, allows herself to become more and more entangled with the enigmatic doctor.

If Matilda makes a mistake, it's not a very melodramatic one. Ann Oakley doesn't go in for histrionics. For the most part her style smoothes over any jagged edges: detached, sophisticated, a little arch and—dare one say it?—a little superficial.

She doesn't penetrate to the heart of her characters, even though she does attempt to get a sense of immediacy across by her too-frequent and often irrelevant use of the present tense. It's a nice little trick when it's used sparingly and to a purpose. But it shouldn't be over-exploited. And, though authorial detachment can work wonders to achieve, in different contexts, satire or pathos, it needs, again, to be conscious of the effect it wants to produce.

The main problem with *Matilda's Mistake* is the character of Stephen van den Biot. OK, so he's an enigma—hero to some, charlatan to others—with no apparent past and an invented name. But though his strange anonymity fascinates or repels those around him, he remains rather too elusive from the reader's viewpoint. The clues we're given as to how to evaluate him are too subtle. The hints thrown out as to his background don't really add up to enough. He's certainly no hero. But we never know quite how much of a villain he is. At the end of the day, this is more perplexing than intriguing.

If the characterisation is a little low-key, the irony—and with all Roman Hall's pretentious (and expensive) medical methods there is plenty of scope for it—is a bit too genteel. Willow Cornford, no expenses spared, deposits a sample of her hair at Roman Hall for their preconception screening programme: "What if I am deficient in zinc? Or cadmium? I could have too much lead, Anthony." This is an unusual twist on the conventional headache as an excuse for avoiding sexual intercourse. Why not make a bit more of it?

Sometimes, however, the sardonic tone succeeds, and *Matilda's Mistake* can be entertaining. But it's a lightweight novel. Ultimately, you don't really care what happens to Matilda, or van den Biot, or the Cornfords, or the sad ex-girlfriend of an insensitive novelist who gives birth to his baby, is admitted to a mental ward, and gives him the opportunity to find himself in fatherhood. Somehow, there's not enough compassion in this book.

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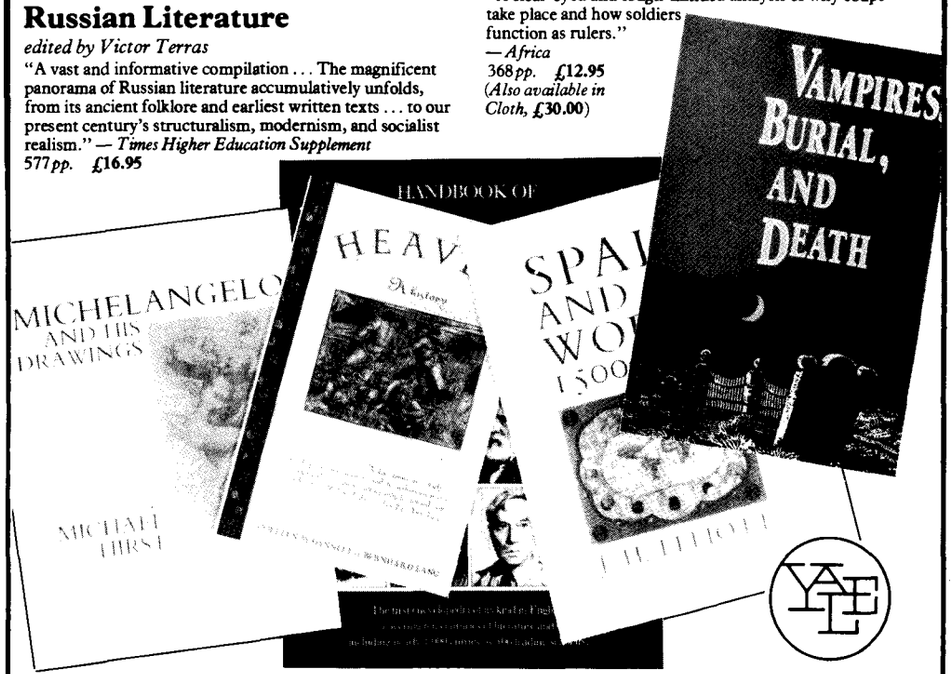

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PUBLIC INTEREST

A slender thread

We should cherish child benefit. It's the only true "citizens' benefit" we have

Ruth Lister

"Legislation cannot make irresponsible parents responsible. But it can and must ensure that absent parents pay maintenance for their children. It is not fair for them to expect other families to foot their bills too." Thus went the central message of Mrs Thatcher's much-heralded "family policy" speech last month.

The last sentence gives the game away. The concern behind this preoccupation with the maintenance of children in lone parent families has little to do with their welfare. It comes from worry over the public expenditure implications of the increase in the proportion of lone parent families living on income support.

If the welfare of children were the primary consideration, ministers might like to ponder the research which suggests that some separated and divorced women actually feel that the poverty of lone parenthood is preferable to their previous position. This is mainly because they have more control over the resources coming into the household. There is a growing body of evidence which shows that resources are not always shared fairly within the family, to the detriment of women and children.

The new right pundits, obsessed with the evils of dependence on the "benefits culture", either deny or ignore the hidden female and child poverty that can be the price of economic dependence on men. Instead, this private dependence is reinforced by changes in social security and maintenance rules (including absent fathers' liability for the mother's as well as the child's maintenance at income support levels), all in the name of increasing independence.

Of course, married women are now able to achieve a degree of economic independence through paid employment. The rewards from low-paid part-time work are still pretty meagre, particularly if child-care costs have to be met out of them. In the majority of couples with a pre-school-age child, the woman is still economically dependent on her male partner. The only income that many of these women receive in their own right, albeit on behalf of their children, is child benefit.

It has become fashionable in some quarters to argue that a universal child benefit, paid regardless of income, is no longer needed in this era of two-earner families and rising living standards. A new variation, taken up by some of the right-wing think tanks, is to confine the benefit to children under five. Others propose extra help, above the basic child benefit, for families with a pre-school child. At the same time, calls can be heard for the reintroduction of child tax allowances.

All these proposals are carefully assessed and convincingly rejected in a recent report by Joan C Brown. She also draws on continental European experience to show how child benefit could, with additional resources, be tailored to meet different families' needs. (*Child Benefit: Options for the 1990s*. Save Child Benefit, c/o Child Poverty Action Group, 4th Floor, 1-5 Bath Street, London EC1 9PY.)

This is not the time to mount a diversionary and divisive campaign to bring back child tax allowances

In answer to the question "why should we support families with children?" Brown reminds us of children's rights as human beings and of the shared responsibility between individual parents and the wider commnunity for their well-being. As a childless person, I am conscious that it is other people's children who will be paying my future pension. I therefore have an interest in their welfare. As raising children lowers family living standards, it makes sense that the state should redistribute income from the childless and over the life-course.

Proposals to restrict the payment of child benefit on grounds of age or parental income would breach these principles. The example of the few European countries tempted to go down the means-testing road shows that it is fraught with difficulties. In the face of consequent pressure to reintroduce child tax allowances (CTAs) to compensate middle-income families, Denmark abandoned the income-testing of child benefit. West Germany introduced a convoluted system of child tax allowances and credits.

The case for the resurrection of CTAs is now being made. Its advocates see it as the only way to reverse the damaging financial trend against families with children. The trouble is, as Joan Brown demonstrates, that CTAs are a less fair and less efficient method of child support than child benefit. Those below or only just above the tax threshold receive no or little benefit unless the allowance is converted into a cash credit. In a large proportion of families, the allowance would be claimed by the father—either because the mother was not in paid work, or was earning too little to qualify. This reduces its visibility as "children's money". Even in families where the man's income is shared fairly, it is less likely to be spent on them.

What Joan Brown calls the "child protection role" of child benefit would also be weakened. As employment and family patterns become increasingly unstable, the reliability and regularity of a benefit tied unconditionally to the child becomes all the more valuable. It is this protective role which arguably makes child benefit a benefit for the future and not, as some maintain, a relic of the past.

Child benefit's own future is, however, uncertain. It hangs on the slender thread of a comma in the 1987 Conservative manifesto pledge that it will "continue to be paid as now, and direct to the mother". Whether or not it is frozen for a fourth year running will be decided over the next month or so. The revelation that the proportion of children living below half average income (after housing costs) doubled to just over a quarter between 1979 and 1987, at a time of growing concern about "the family", provides new ammunition for child benefit's supporters (who once included both the social security secretary and the chancellor). This is not the time to mount a diversionary and divisive campaign to bring back tax allowances.

Labour should be making child benefit's future a key election issue. It should form the centrepiece of a progressive family policy, the building blocks of which lie scattered in its policy documents. In the meantime, how many of you with children or grandchildren have written to your MP and/or Tony Newton at the DSS in defence of child benefit? Child benefit's survival cannot be left to the campaigning organisations alone. It is not just the immediate interests of children and families which are at stake. Child benefit also has a symbolic importance as the one true "citizenship" benefit we have.

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VOLUNTEER NOTICE BOARD is a free service provided by New Statesman & Society with financial assistance from Thames Television's Help programme. Interested organisations are invited to send their copy (approximately 45 words) to Dawn King at New Statesman & Society, Foundation House, Perseverance Works, 38 Kingsland Road, London, E2 8DQ by Friday preceding publication date. Please note this service is for recruiting volunteers only. If you have salaried vacancies contact the Classified Department on 071-739-1645.

VOLUNTEER NEEDED. We are developing a new initiative in outreach work with college based young people. We need an enthusiastic volunteer who has experience in counselling and youth work, to assist the Student Services Advisor in developing this innovative project. Time involved - 1 day p/w during term time. Expenses paid. Journey 35 mins from London. Contact: Sasha at Open Door, 35 Brooke Road, Grays, Essex. Tel: 0375 378678.

WESTMINSTER Carers Service. We offer respite care in the home to relieve carers for a few hours a week. Do you have any spare time? We need reliable, responsible and caring people who would enjoy being with an elderly or disabled person enabling their carer to have a break. Please contact Sarah or David on 976 5999 or write to W.C.S., St James the Less Centre, Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2PT.

TO THE LIGHTHOUSE – sponsored cycle ride for AIDS charities needs volunteers for Sunday September 9th. Please call Susie or Donna on 071-737 7273 from 11 am to 7 pm.

FEMALE COMEDY WRITER with M.E. needs female live-in volunteer general assistant/ driver. Age 18-30. No special skills or experience required but competent driving, energy, and flexibility important. Interest in sport and/or outdoor pursuits an advantage. Accommodation plus £39 per week. Min two months. Contact Ann Fletcher, Buckden Towers, Buckden, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 9TH.

SOUTH WEST SURREY - local volunteers wanted for HELP-LINE being launched for carers of people with mental health problems. Volunteers work from home, must have a phone and preferably experience of caring. Contact Margaret, Guildford (0483) 578269 for further details. The number given on 10th August was incorrect, sorry. Helpline, not yet fully operational, is (0483) 38936.

BURY ST. EDMUNDS Cyrenians are seeking a volunteer to live, work and share their life with homeless people in an exciting new project, providing accommodation for 10 homeless people. Valuable experience will be gained. Volunteers are expected to stay for at least six months. Free board and lodging + generous weekly allowance. Write to Susan Woodward, Project Co-ordinator, Britannia House, 28 Ipswich St., Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 1SX for an application form and job description, or telephone 0284 756122.

FULL TIME FEMALE helpers needed for young disabled woman to live independently in the south west London area. No experience needed, just enthusiasm, a sense of humour and a willingness to learn how to lift. The helper would need to be between 5'4" & 5'8" and weighing not less than nine and a half stones (this is to make lifting easier). Free accommodation with all gas and electricity bills paid and an allowance of £44 p/w. For more details please call Maureen on 071 736 6941.

VOLUNTEER REGIONAL Co-ordinators Sept/Oct. An unusual opportunity for an executive to make a significant contribution to the welfare of blind people in the UK. A person, possibly early retired, with senior management experience and able to act on own initiative. About 10 hrs p/w for 16 months, administering an appeal and committee based on home locality. Most counties needed. All expenses reimbursed. CV and phone no. to: Michael Holden, Talking Newspaper, 90 High Street, Heathfield TN21 8JD.

THAMES HELP

Thames Help, presented by Jackie Spreckley, is a four minute local social action programme. It appears four times a week on Thames Televison at 5.55 approximately (check TV Times for details). Here is a summary of this week's programmes.

Please note that THAMES HELP will not be transmitted on the Bank Holiday Monday, 27th August.

This week THAMES HELP looks at **London Youth Adventure,** an exciting new charity set up with money from the **Telethon** appeal, which provides cash grants to disadvantaged 13-21 year olds all over the Thames region to help turn dreams of adventure into reality.

Tuesday 28th August - Horse Riding

13 year old Susan Leeds suffered from cancer from the age of seven. Now completely cured she applied to London Youth Adventure for a cash grant to pay for horse riding lessons. THAMES HELP joined Susan at the London Equestrian Centre in Finchley for her first lesson.

For more information ring 071-388 8282 or write to Paul Wilson, LYA, c/o Thames Television, 149 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1P 9LL.

Wednesday 29th August - Indoor Rock Climbing

Jemil Kewfi is a 19 year old student with a passion for rock climbing. Struggling to make ends meet on a student grant he applied to London Youth Adventure for a cash grant to purchase some basic climbing equipment. As London is rather short on mountains THAMES HLEP met up with Jemil as he prepared to scale the indoor climbing wall at the Ensign Youth Club in East London.

For more information ring 071-388 8282 or write to Paul Wilson, LYA, c/o Thames Television, 149 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1P 9LL.

Thursday 30th August - Ballroom Dancing

Paula Knight is 15 and loves ballroom dancing. A fincancial crisis at home meant that she was unable to take lessons or buy dancing shoes. Thanks to a cash grant from London Youth Adventure she is now tripping the light fantastic each week at Cooks Dance Studio in Romford. Jackie Spreckley puts her best foot forward and joins Paula on the ballroom floor.

For more information ring 071-388 8282 or write to Paul Wilson, LYA, c/o Thames Television, 149 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1P 9LL.

THAMES TELEVISION

Thames Help, Thames Television PLC, 149 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9LL. Telephone: 01-387 9494.

CHESTER AID for the Homeless requires f/time volunteer project workers to work with homeless men in Chester. Chester Aid for the Homeless has vacancies for residential volunteers in all 3 projects: an emergency hostel, night shelter and long stay resettlement centre. All volunteers receive £25 p/w + board & lodgings. For further details please contact Sally Gear on 0244 318360 or write: Roodee House, 22 Grosvenor Street, Chester CH1 2DD.

COUNCIL for the Protection of Rural England is seeking a volunteer to assist its Records Officer with keeping its paper files and reference section up to date. Reliability, a meticulous approach and an eye for detail is needed to carry out this job. Reasonable travel expenses are offered in exchange for commitment to a minimum of one day per week. Please contact Anne Wheelwright at CPRE, 25 Buckingham Palace Rd, London, SW1W OPP, Tel. 071 976 6433.

INDEPENDENT Living Alternatives promotes independence for people disabled. At present we urgently need women who can drive. Helpers provide physical support in return for free board and lodgings plus £40 per week. If you want to become part of a progressive London based community initiative, contact us at: Independent Living Alternatives, Fulton Hse, Fulton Rd, Empire Way, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 OTF. 081 902 8998 ext 270.

ADFAM National Helpline for the families and friends of drug users needs volunteers to provide information & support to callers. Full training given. Expenses provided. Helpline is open 10 am to 4 pm Monday to Friday - close to South Kensington tube. Please call Anne on 071 823 9313 for further details.

BUILD A RELATIONSHIP and watch it grow. Some children have no-one else who really listens to them. Some have little contact with a positive male figure. Join our volunteer group, men & women, and get to know one of these children. If you are interested, live within reach of Islington, and have 2/3 hours a week to spare, contact Span on 071 250 1223.

VOLUNTEER DRIVER/CARER wanted for young disabled art students in small project on South coast for September - July. Free accom., own room + £40.50 p/w living expenses. Good opportunity to take time out of your life while thinking about what to do with the rest of it! Contact Cindy 0243 264660.

LEWISHAM Befrienders would like to hear from local people who could give a few hours each week to help youngsters whose only other contact with adults may be remote figures in authority. All interested contact Leonard Davis Co-ordinator, Lewisham Befrienders, London SE8 4AU. Tel: (081) 692-0236.

LIVERPOOL Personal Service Society. The Home Service offers volunteer support to people facing a terminal illness at home, their partners and families. We are now recruiting volunteers who are able to offer time to provide a flexible support service. The role includes befriending and sharing interests & time with the ill person, being available to listen & talk to all concerned, providing respite for the main carer, accompanying to hospital and supporting partners & families in the early stages of bereavement. Drivers are especially welcome. Expenses are payable. Contact Gillian Moore on 051-236 5255. For information on other volunteer and community projects tel. Mary Bold on 051-236 5255.

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Appointments

INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR CHILD STUDIES

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Salary will be according to age and experience with a max of £16,000.

Further details and an application form are obtainable from:

Miss Jenny Cobb,
International Centre for Child Studies
Ashley Down House,
16 Cotham Park,
Bristol BS6 6BU.

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Application by c.v and accompanying letter. Details: telephone 021 472 7242. QPEP, Woodbrooke, 1046 Bristol Road, Birmingham B29 6LJ. Closing date: September 6, 1990.

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Salary scale: £14,536 - £17,369 (Group 6). Ref: HM

For further details and an application form please telephone 081-741 8498 (24-hour ansaphone) quoting the reference number above or write to Rosie Hubble, Recruitment Assistant, Notting Hill Housing Group, 26 Paddenswick Road, W6 0UB.

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ENDGAMES

WEEKEND COMPETITION

No 3039 Set by E O Parrott
Modern nursery rhymes.

Report by Grace Elegy
I have received a note from my co-judge Ms de Meaner. "Be positive, Grace!" I detect the beseeching tone of someone who unfairly lashed out in a fit of temper last week and wants someone else to soothe your ruffled feathers.

My first positive reaction is to the huge numbers who have entered this competition. I admire enthusiasm. My second is to your refusual to be stifled by any hidebound rules governing scansion, metre and, especially, rhyme. Robin Chase seems to think that merely repeating the same word, occasionally dropping into the plural, is all that is required: for example, he rhymes "book" with "books", and then, in a fit of exhuberance, goes back to "book".

I am awarding £8 to each winner, and a special £7 bonus to Bill Greenwell for making me chuckle. It must be said that your entries were very depressing. In a perky kind of way, I hasten to add!

Westland
Michael's getting shirty,
Getting in a huff;
Says they're playing dirty,
Says he's had enough.
Someone's sent a letter,
Someone's had it leaked;
Someone should know better,
Someone's gone and sneaked.
Someone's been a sinner—
Leon takes the blame.
Maggie is the winner—
Isn't that a shame?

Birmingham Six
Paddy's in the lock-up;
Paddy's got some weals;
Can't afford a cock-up—
See that Paddy squeals.
"Cough, you Irish bastard—
Do you think we're soft?"
Paddy's getting plastered—
Paddy's duly coughed.
Martin Fagg

Ride a C5
Invented by Clive
To look a right Charlie
As slowly you drive.
With feet on the pedals
And head in the snow
You will hear laughter
Wherever you go,
You go, you go, you go...
Katie Mallett

Arthur Scargill took the cash,
From the Russian miners
Put it in his piggy bank
All to pay his "Diners".
John Stanley

Mary had a little lamb,
It tasted quite delightful:
"Oh, what a lucky girl I am!"
She cried. Her death was frightful.
Ron Rubin

Half a pound of tuppenny rice,
Half a pound of fourpenny rice,
Half a pound of rice for a quid,
Half a pound of rice for a tenner,
That's the way the money goes,
We all drop dead.
Bill Greenwell

GRAFFITI BY PAIGE

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Old John Gummer had a daughter, EIEIO,
And to that girl he fed mad cow, EIEIO,
With a bovine here,
And a spongiform there,
Here encephalitis,
There a beef free zone,
Everywhere a health scare,
Young Ms Gummer had BSE, EIEIO.

Sue Fenton

Argie Bargie caught a penguin
On an island in the sea.
Maggie Baggie had to send in
Lots of ships to set it free.

Argie Bargie lost his penguin,
Maggie Baggie crowed with glee,
For she knew that it would end in
Vict'ry over worms like me.

Cynthia Hall

This is the bureaucrat, out of place,
Who was forced to resign with egg on his face,
And horribly died of allergic rash,
After telling the farmers to save their cash
By killing the lamb that was staggering blind,
And mixing its brain with what scraps they could find,
To feed the mad cow in her padded cell—
To feed the hen in a cage too small
That laid the egg, that started it all,
That was found on the farm that MAFF built.

C L Tomkins

Sing a song of poll-tax,
Each one shall pay the same,
Several million people,
Conned by the dame.

When the Bill was drafted,
The rich began to sing,
At least, those with no consc-ience,
Who live in towns like Tring.

Chas F Garvey

"Who went to Falklands?"
"I," said the dame,
"And I'd do it again.
I went to Falklands."
All the voters of Britain fell a-crying hooray!
When they saw it on telly a long way away.

T Griffiths

Sing a song of sunshine,
A greenhouse in the sky;
Lots of little humans
Baked in a pie.
When the world grows warmer,
We'll all begin to singe
But go on burning fuel
In a final binge.

John Marriott

No 3042 Set by P S Burton

The *Spectator* has more cosy interviews up its sleeve. Sneak previews of A N Wilson's chats with a living (dead, if you're *too* outrageous), public figure which reveal a side to their character which you suspected but has never been proven. By 6 September.

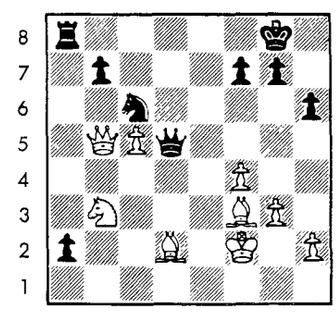
CHESS

With a half-point lead in the last round of the British Championship, Jim Plaskett did something totally out of character. He offered David Norwood a draw. Of course, Plaskett is well known to be a percentage player—either one 100 per cent, or nothing. While others have modelled their styles on great masters of the classical period, such as Capablanca or Alekhine, Plaskett harks back to the older Norse tradition of a berserker, hacking in naked frenzy amid the bloodiest scenes of slaughter. I strongly suspect these tactics of being conducive to glorious failure. Certainly that had been Plaskett's lot in the British: never more glorious than in 1984 (8 wins, 3 losses, 0 draws), or 1989 (7 wins, 4 losses, and again none of those snivelling peace treaties).

If Plaskett offers a draw, his position must be bleak indeed. So Norwood declined. Well, we all know what happens to people who turn down draws, don't we? They proceed to lose. So Jim Plaskett is the new British Champion. Leading scores (out of 11) were: 1 Plaskett 9; 2 Hodgson 8½; 3 Mestel 8; 4-7= Adams, Emms, King and Speelman 7½.

If any one game can be singled out as decisive, it was the encounter between Plaskett and Mestel in the penultimate round. Jonathan Mestel had been setting the pace for a week and a half, but here he engineers his own demise. Much worse from the opening, he fights back and then promptly self-destructs: **Plaskett—Mestel, Eastbourne 1990. Old Indian Defence.**
1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 d6 3 Nc3 e5 4 Nf3 Nbd7 5 Bg5 c6 6 e3 Be7 7 Qc2 Ng4?! 8 h3 exd4 Black does not want to open the h-file for White with 8...Bxg5 9 hxg4. This point prompted Speelman to dream up an amazing idea: why not 8...Nh2! ? **9 Bxe7 Qxe7 10 Nxd4 Nh6** He cannot allow 11 Nf5, but the Knight on the rim is a real handicap for Black from here on. **11 0-0-0 Nc5 12 g4 Bd7 13 Bg2 0-0 14 e4 Be6 15 Qe2** Not the most incisive. 15 f4!, threatening g4-g5, seems very strong. **Qg5+ 16 Kb1 Rfe8 17 Nf3 Qg6** Against 17...Qf4 Plaskett had prepared 18 Rd4!, winning instantly. **18 Ka1 f5!** Black has unexpected counterplay. **19 exf5 Bxf5 20 Qd2 Ne4?** But this loses. According to Plaskett, Black's best was 20...Bc2, though he thought 21 Nh4 Qd3 22 Qxd3 Nxd3 23 Rd2 still left White on top. **21 gxf5 Qxg2 22 Nxe4 Rxe4 23 Ng5! Rxc4 24 Rhg1 Qh2** Or 24...Qd5 25 Qe2 Rd4 26 Rxd4 Qxd4 27 Qe6+ Kh8 28 Qxh6! **25 Qe2 Rd4 26 Qe6+ Kh8 27 Rde1 1-0** Mestel resigned because there is no reasonable defence against the smothered mate in either of the two forms in which it is threatened: 28 Qe8+ or 28 Qxh6 gxh6 29 Nf7.

In fact, Plaskett was not pleased with the way he had played. Perhaps the two draws he conceded on the way to the title were depressing him. He was more interested in renewing our long-standing debate in the philosophy of mind, in which he is trying to persuade me to abandon my dogmatic physicalism. This must be one of Jim's lost causes because, being an analytical philosopher, I train on disbelieving six impossible things before breakfast. But when he does publish his collection of freakish coincidences in the style of Arthur Koestler he is sure to find a more amenable audience. In the meantime there is his book on chess to read, appropriately entitled *Playing to Win*. While Britain's most entertaining Grandmaster was winning the title, Mihai Suba, another uncompromising performer, had one of his worse tournaments. At least he took away the consolation of the brilliancy prize for this effort in the final round:
Ward—Suba, Eastbourne 1990. English Opening.
1 c4 Nf6 2 Nc3 c5 3 Nf3 e6 4 d4 cxd4 5 Nxd4 Bb4 6 g3 0-0 7 Bg2 d5 8 Qb3 Bxc3+ 9 Qxc3 e5 10 Nb3 d4 11 Qa5 Qe8 11...Qe7 would be conventional, but perhaps this is stronger. **12 0-0 Nc6 13 Qa4 h6 14 Nc5 a5 15 a3 e4 16 b4 Qe7 17 Nb3 Rd8 18 Bb2 e3 19 f4** Speelman commented that 19 Bxc6 and 20 Bxd4 looks sensible. But he can hardly be blamed for failing to spot Black's reply. **Bh3! 20 Bxh3 axb4 21 Qb5 bxa3 22 Bc1 Ne4 23 Bg4 d3 24 exd3** Is there an objection to 24 Bxe3 ? I presume the intention was 24...dxe2 and if 25 Bxe2 Nc3. **Rxd3 25 c5 Nf2 26 Rxf2 exf2+ 27 Kxf2 Qe4 28 Ra2 Qd5 29 Rd2 Rxd2+ 30 Bxd2 a2 31 Bf3** *See Diagram.* **Qxf3+! 32 Kxf3 a1=Q** The point, of course, is 33 Nxa1 Nd4+. **33 Qxb7 Qh1+ 34 Ke3 Rb8 0-1** To conclude with a piece of bad news on the draw for the first round of the world championship candidates' matches: just guess who Speelman and Short are playing. Yes, I'm afraid so—each other.



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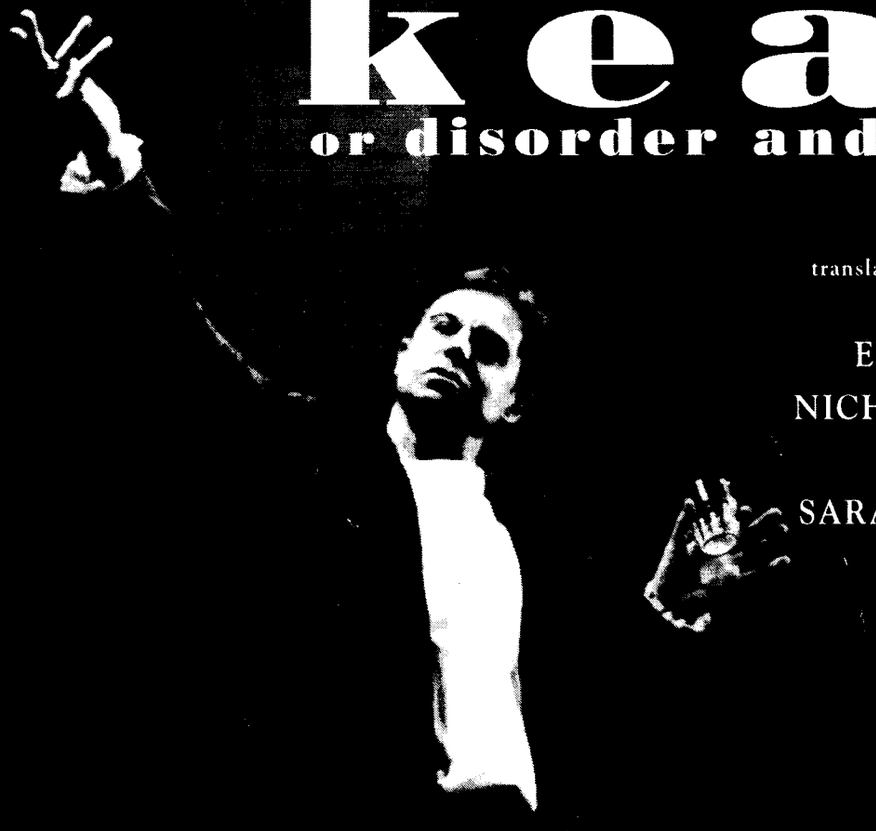

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